

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL Monterey, California



## THESIS

**THE CRISIS OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN  
VENEZUELA: TESTING RATIONAL CHOICE,  
CULTURAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL THEORIES**

by

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December 1999

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DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 3

20000313 017

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE December 1999		3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in Venezuela: Testing Rational Choice, Cultural and, Institutional Theories				5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Cortés, José Luis					
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.					
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.				12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)  The thesis analyzes the extent to which civil-military relations in Venezuela have deteriorated in the past decade. The thesis's central theme is that the civilian control over the military in Venezuela is far from ideal. The relations between the armed forces and the decision-makers are based only on the interactions of the President with the military. There are no other civilian institutions involved in the control of the military. However, the armed forces of Venezuela have shown very strong democratic principles and any increase in the presence of the armed forces in the political and economic arena is the result of civilians' request. The armed forces of Venezuela have not sought to tilt the balance of power in their favor. In addition, the thesis addresses how well each of the three major approaches of comparative politics to explain the Venezuela situation.					
14. SUBJECT TERMS Civil-Military Relations, Political Parties, Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations, Coup d'état attempts, Civilian control over the military, Military Professionalization, Rational Choice, Culture, Institutionalism				15. NUMBER OF PAGES 117	
				16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified		19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified		20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UL

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)  
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39-18

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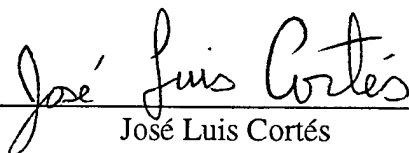
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**

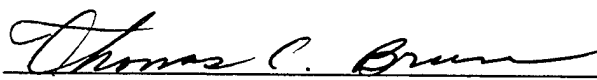
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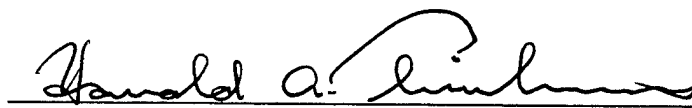
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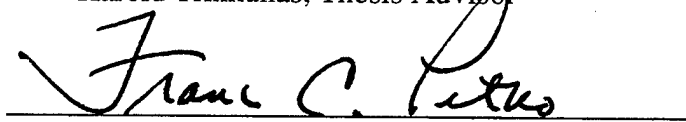
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## ABSTRACT

The thesis analyzes the extent to which civil-military relations in Venezuela have deteriorated in the past decade. The thesis's central theme is that the civilian control over the military in Venezuela is far from ideal. The relations between the armed forces and the decision-makers are based only on the interactions of the President with the military. There are no other civilian institutions involved in the control of the military. However, the armed forces of Venezuela have shown very strong democratic principles and any increase in the presence of the armed forces in the political and economic arena is the result of civilians' request. The armed forces of Venezuela have not sought to tilt the balance of power in their favor. In addition, the thesis addresses how well each of the three major approaches of comparative politics to explain the Venezuela situation.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	OBJECTIVE.....	1
B.	BACKGROUND.....	1
C.	THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	3
1.	Theory.....	5
D.	METHODOLOGY AND IMPORTANCE.....	9
E.	ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY.....	11
F.	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	12
II.	THE CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA FROM 1958 UNTIL 1999.....	13
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	13
B.	THE ARMED FORCES OF VENEZUELA FROM 1830 UNTIL 1958.....	14
C.	THE ARMED FORCES AND THE TRANSITION PROCESS OF VENEZUELA'S CURRENT DEMOCRATIC ERA.....	17
D.	THE STRONG PRESIDENTIALISM IN VENEZUELA.....	19
E.	CIVILIAN CONTROL OVER THE MILITARY IN VENEZUELA.....	20
F.	THE FAILURE OF THE RENTIER STATE.....	23
G.	THE COUP ATTEMPTS OF 1992.....	27
1.	The Bolivarian 200 Army.....	31
2.	The 5 <sup>th</sup> of July Movement.....	36
3.	Reasons for the Failure of the Two Coups Attempts.....	37
4.	¡Por Ahora! (¡Just for Now!).....	39
H.	CONCLUSIONS.....	42
III.	THE CHANGES IN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA.....	45
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	45
B.	THE ALFRED STEPAN MODEL AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE MILITARY PREROGATIVES IN VENEZUELA.....	47
1.	Military Relationships to the Head of the State.....	47
2.	Active Duty Military Participation in the Cabinet.....	49
3.	Role of Senior Career Civil Servants or Civilian Political Appointees.....	50
4.	Role of Civilian Authorities in Military Promotions.....	51
5.	Role of the Military in State Enterprises.....	53
6.	Role of the Military in Internal Security Issues.....	54
7.	Control of the Intelligence Apparatus.....	55
8.	Role of Civilians and Officers in Formulating Security Strategy and Defining the Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces.....	56
C.	ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS.....	59



D.	CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE PREROGATIVES OF THE MILITARY IN VENEZUELA.....	60
E.	ASSESSMENTS OF THE MODEL PRESENTED BY ALFRED STEPAN.....	61
IV.	ANALYTICAL MODELS AS APPLIED TO THE STATUS OF CIVIL- MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA.....	63
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	63
B.	RATIONAL CHOICE, CULTURAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS.....	64
1.	Rational Choice.....	65
2.	Culturalism.....	69
3.	Institutionalism.....	73
V.	CONCLUSIONS.....	85
A.	SUMMARY.....	85
B.	DETERIORATION OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA.....	86
C.	THE THEORETICAL EXPLANATION OF THE DETERIORATION OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA.....	88
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	91
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST.....	97

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Military High Command of Venezuelan.....50

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## **LIST OF TABLES**

1. Selected Prerogatives of the Venezuelan Military 1961-1992-1999 .....60

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis assesses the prospects for civil-military relations in Venezuela. In a single case study, the thesis argues that in Venezuela the civil-military relations have deteriorated in the last ten years and this deterioration places democracy at risk. Despite four decades of democratic experience, the decision-makers of Venezuela are currently facing political challenges similar to those of the new democracies. The need for restructuring the economy and the need for maintaining the armed forces under democratic civilian control are the two most difficult tasks to be accomplished by the political leaders of Venezuela.

The thesis addressed only the issue of civil-military relations. First, it assesses the way in which the civil-military relations have evolved since 1958. Second, it analyzes the causes of the changes. The analysis was made using the approach of each of the major schools of comparative politics. This therefore, is a theory testing exercise.

The thesis uses the approaches and models of civil-military relations presented by Samuel Huntington in *The Soldier and the State: Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, developed later by Morris Janowitz, Erik Nordlinger, Felipe Agüero, Samuel Fitch, and others. This thesis focuses on an extensive review of bibliographic material and press reports to assess the causes of the coup attempts of 1992, which are the clearest indication of the deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela.

Once the historical framework is presented, the thesis uses the model presented by Alfred Stepan in his work *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone* to

assess the level of changes occurring in the military prerogatives in Venezuela as a means of measuring the deterioration of the civil-military relations.

The results indicate that between 1961 and 1999, eight out of the nine prerogatives studied were ranked higher than in 1958, thereby favoring the military. This is evidence of the increasing influence of the military in the political arena. Contrariwise, according to Alfred Stepan's framework these changes are an indication of the weakening of the civilian control over the military.

The model presented by Alfred Stepan is useful to assess the level of the changes occurring in the military prerogatives. However, it does not explain why these changes occurred. Although the changes in the prerogatives indicate a weakening of the civilian control over the military, they do not explain the reason why. The model's application left some questions unanswered like the reason for the abrupt changes in the military behavior in 1992. Why were there attempted coups? Why did they fail? Why did the population not support the insurgents? Why, if the military controls most of the key dimensions mentioned by Stepan in his model, civilian authorities still have control over the military? These questions are the subject of the next chapter.

Explanations for these changes were found once the analytical approaches of each of the three schools of comparative politics were applied. In that sense, the institutional approach proved the most useful in understanding the causes of the deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela.

Finally, the thesis concluded that the transformation of Venezuela from an agrarian State to a Petro-State defined the institutional structures of the newly centralized nation-state. A very strong presidential system was established based on clientelism and

nepotism. The head of state concentrated power in his hands, dominated the political parties, and established a subjective model for controlling the military. Meanwhile, congress ignored the issues of national security and left the control of the military only in the hands of the president.

The fall of oil prices in the late 1980s created the need for economical and political reforms that were violently unwelcomed by the population. Consequently, the over reaction of the government to the popular disobedience of 1989 triggered the two coup attempts of 1992. These two military uprisings and the increasing presence of active duty officers in many areas of the economic and political realm indicate the diminishing of the civilian's control over the armed forces, thereby deteriorating civil-military relations in Venezuela.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to acknowledge the support of Professor Thomas Bruneau and Professor Harold Trinkunas, my two advisors. Their academic help in the completion of this thesis, their dedication, and their knowledge made my work a lot easier. I want to express my deep gratitude to Professor Jeanne Giraldo for her useful comments and recommendations during the past two quarters. I am especially grateful to Liseth -my wife, to José Luis and to Ernesto José -my children. I acknowledge their sacrifice, the time that I spent away from them, their patience, and overall their love. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Inés -my mother who passed away two days after I had begun these graduate studies.

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. OBJECTIVE**

This thesis assesses the prospects for civil-military relations in Venezuela. In a single case study, the thesis argues that in Venezuela civil-military relations have deteriorated in the last ten years and this deterioration places democracy at risk. Despite four decades of democratic experience, the decision-makers of Venezuela are currently facing political challenges similar to those of the new democracies. The need for restructuring the economy and the need for maintaining the Armed Forces under democratic civilian control are the two most difficult tasks to be accomplished by the political leaders of Venezuela.

The thesis will address only the issue of civil-military relations. First, it assesses the way in which civil-military relations have evolved since 1958. Second, it analyzes the causes for their changes. The analysis is made using the approach of cultural, structural and institutional school comparative politics.<sup>1</sup> This is, therefore, a theory testing exercise.

## **B. BACKGROUND**

During the decades of 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's, Venezuela enjoyed what once was called an exceptionally stable institutionalized party system in comparison with the

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<sup>1</sup> Lichbach, Mark and Alan Zuckerman, Eds. *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press, 1997, 7.

rest of Latin America<sup>2</sup>. Even with the popular uprisings of February 1989, and the two coup attempts of 1992 that seemed to end the "Venezuelan Exceptionalism," Venezuela still is a unique country in the region.<sup>3</sup>

First of all, while most of the more recent transitional processes in the hemisphere have been characterized by long bargaining between civilian and military, the Venezuelan transition was the result of easy and fast settlements among political élites, without the involvement of the Armed Forces.<sup>4</sup> Second, while in the 1960's when most of Latin America was under military authoritarianism, Venezuela enjoyed a democratic regime. Third, while in the 1970's when most of the hemisphere suffered economic hardship, Venezuela enjoyed the oil booms and was called "Venezuela Saudita." Fourth, while in the 1990's when most of the countries in the region were quasi-stable democracies, Venezuela suffered two coup attempts. In sum, Venezuela seems to be an exception in the hemisphere.

Moreover, the exceptionalism of Venezuela once again can be found when studying the causes of the crisis of civil-military relations in 1992, which reached its climax during the two coup attempts. This crisis was not caused by the struggle for power between civilian and military institutions like the rest of Latin America. The

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<sup>2</sup> Kornblith, Miriam and Daniel Levine, "Venezuela: The Life and Times of a Party System," in Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully, eds. *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*, (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1995), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Levine, Daniel, "Good-Bye to Venezuelan Exceptionalism," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 36, (Winter 1994), 147.

<sup>4</sup> Peeler, John, "Elite settlements and Democratic Consolidation: Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela," in John Higley and Richard Gunter, Eds. *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992), 102.

Venezuelan case, once again, as an exception in the hemisphere, was characterized by military discontent with the institutional deterioration of civilian government. It is what Felipe Agüero terms the struggle between "military ethics and political corruption"<sup>5</sup>.

The uniqueness of the Venezuelan case creates an ideal scenario for testing theories. Civil-military relations in Venezuela can be partly explained by any of the approaches of the three schools of comparative politics. The followers of rational choice, culture, and institutionalism can find in Venezuela a rich environment for testing their approaches.

### C. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis argues that in Venezuela, civilian control over the military has weakened during the past decade. Furthermore, it argues that civil-military relations in Venezuela have deteriorated to a point that becomes a threat to the democratic stability of the country.

As part of the theoretical framework that will be used as the basis for this thesis it is necessary to define accurately what it is meant by civilian control over the military. When studying Latin America today, it is very difficult to formulate an accurate definition of civilian control over the military. It is not enough to say that civilians have an effective control of the military when there is the absence of a coup d'état or any rebellious movement within the Armed Forces. It is also necessary to consider the degree

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<sup>5</sup> Agüero, Felipe, "Crisis and Decay of Democracy in Venezuela: The Civil-Military Dimension," in Jennifer McCoy and Williams Smith, Eds. *Venezuelan Democracy Under Stress* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami North-South Center, 1995, 215.

of unquestionable and unconditional military compliance with civilian government authority.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of civilian control over the military used in this thesis is derived from the approach taken by J. Samuel Fitch in his book *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America*. J. Samuel Fitch assesses three essential characteristics that any democratic system of civil-military relations must possess in order to consider itself as having effective control of the military. The incorporation of these characteristics enriches the concept of civilian control. First, the military must be politically subordinated to the democratic regime. Second, democratic consolidation requires policy control of the Armed Forces by the constitutionally designated authorities to which the military is professionally and institutionally subordinated. Third, in consolidated democracies, military personnel are subject to the rule of law.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, effective civilian control over the military must allow 'civilian supremacy' which is

The ability of a civilian, democratically elected government to conduct general policy without interference from the military, to formulate and conduct general policy, and monitor the implementation of military policy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Trinkunas, Harold, "Crafting Civilian Control of the Armed Force in Argentina and Venezuela," (paper prepared for delivery at the conference Soldiers & Democracy in Latin America, February 19-20, 1999 at the University of California Riverside, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Fitch, J. Samuel, "The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America" Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press, 1998, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Aguero, Felipe, "Soldiers, Civilians, and Democracy: Post-Franco Spain in Comparative Perspective," Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1995, 19.

In the majority of the countries in Latin America, from the late 1960's until the early 1980's, the military dominated the political process or played a tutelary role over the civilians. Civilians were afraid of the reaction of the Armed Forces in case of their intervention in areas of 'military autonomy.' Civilian control over the military, under the definitions presented above, did not exist. The case of Venezuela represented an exception to this situation. During forty years, the civilian government seemed to have effective control over the military. Thus, when compared with the rest of Latin America, Venezuela was admired.<sup>9</sup>

### 1. Theory

Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The Soldier and the State*, states that, "The principal focus of civil-military relations is the relation of the officers corps to the state."<sup>10</sup> Huntington also develops the ideas of "professional soldiers" and the concepts of "objective" and "subjective" civilian control over the military. Until recently, the ideas were considered the basis for the study of the civil-military relations. However, in the case of Latin America, the Huntingtonian ideas of military professionalism have produced a negative outcome; the higher levels of military professionalism have historically resulted in more military interventions in politics and high levels of military autonomy.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Huntington's idea of objective control as the ability to separate

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<sup>9</sup> Venezuela, Available [On Line]: <[<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-/r? frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ve0081\)>](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-/r? frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ve0081))>: 1.

<sup>10</sup> Huntington, Samuel P., *"The Soldier and the State: Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations,"* Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Fitch, 2. See also Alfred Stepan, *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1971.



the military from politics by the development of high professionalism, focussing their mission on external defense of the nation is contrary to the new professionalism based on the emergence of a military's civilian function. In that sense, many of the constitutionally defined missions of the Armed Forces of Latin America introduce the idea of 'contribution to the development of the nation.' The interpretation of this task has served as a justification for the use of the armed force in functions other than external and internal security. These 'non-military tasks' have become issues of "national security," especially after the end of the Cold War. This event, the end of the Cold War, has left a vacuum in the military mission of some Armed Forces, especially in Latin America. Thus:

The effect of this redefinition of the military's mission was to erase most of the boundary between civilian and military spheres of competence in which the anti-interventionist argument of the classic professionalism relied.<sup>12</sup>

In this case, Venezuela is not an exception to the rule. The Armed Forces of Venezuela, like the rest of Latin America, have incorporated in their missions, among others, issues of internal order and contribution to the development of the country. These new tasks have eroded the Huntingtonian concept of professionalism, pushing the Venezuelan officers' corps to a more "Janowiztonian" approach of professionalism: "Professionalism includes consideration of political-social dimensions and employment of force in non-battle configurations."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fitch, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Sarkesian, Sam, C., "Two Concepts of Military Professionalism," in Michel Louis Martin, and Ellen Stern McCrate, eds., *The Military, Militarism, and the Polity: Essays in Honor of Morris Janowitz* New York, The Free Press, 1984:159.

The employment of the military in missions not related to the defense of the country has created situations where the military have had to seek "special favors" from political leaders in order to accomplish promotion and job appointments. Moreover, the 'politicization' of the upper levels of Armed Forces was evident every time those promotions were discussed. The results of the promotion boards were closely related to the political preferences of the officers involved in the process. Whoever was a sympathizer of the government's party was promoted, otherwise not.

Under these circumstances, the idea of "subjective control" presented by Huntington, becomes more valid: "Civilianize the military, involving them in political participation, making them a mirror of the state."<sup>14</sup> In that sense, the employment of the Venezuelan Armed Forces in civilian functions has produced a civilianization of the officer corps, and in some cases, politicization of the military.

When considering this theoretical framework, it is also helpful to introduce the ideas of Eric A. Nordlinger in his book, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Government*.<sup>15</sup> Here, Nordlinger presents three models of civilian control over the military. First, a traditional model based on the idea of the absence of differences between civilians and military, developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century monarchies where the aristocracy constituted both civilian and military elite. Therefore, there was not conflict between them. Second, The Liberal Model:

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<sup>14</sup> Huntington, 1990a, 83.

<sup>15</sup> Nordlinger, Eric A., " *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Government*," Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall Inc., 1977, 25.

Premised upon the differentiation of elites according to their expertise and responsibilities. The military accepts a distinctively subordinated position to civilian authority due to the far more encompassing responsibilities of the civilian government. Subordination to civilian authority must be internalized as a set of values and beliefs. Civilian authority must exhibit due regard and respect for the military in its actions and statements regarding the military's honor, expertise, autonomy, and political neutrality.<sup>16</sup>

And the third model, called the "Penetration Model" is based on the premise of the civilians achieving loyalty and obedience by penetrating the Armed Forces with political officers and commissars. This model is typical of Communist regimes.

In conclusion, effective civilian control over the military is a necessary condition for democratic stability. The level of this control, its character (objective or subjective), and its model will depend on the conditions of the transition from the authoritarian regime.

In addition, in order to establish the means to measure the status of the civil-military relation in Venezuela, this thesis uses as a theoretical framework the approach presented by Alfred Stepan in his book *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone*.<sup>17</sup> Alfred Stepan provides a model to analyze the status of the civil-military relations of a given country. He employs a matrix comprised of eleven prerogatives. This model is dynamic as it is based on the idea that the balance of power between civilian and military can change. Furthermore, Alfred Stepan explains that a low prerogative is de jure and de facto effective control of the civilians over the military. A

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<sup>16</sup> Nordlinger, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Stepan, Alfred, *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988, 7-12.

moderate prerogative will indicate a balance between the military and the civilians in the control of that specific factor. And finally, a high prerogative is an indication of the control of the Armed Forces over the civilians.

However, this thesis considers only some of the prerogatives from the model of Alfred Stepan. They are: military relationships to the Head of the state, active-duty participation in the cabinet, the role of senior servants or civilian political appointees, the role in military promotion, and role in the state enterprise. The other six prerogatives presented by Alfred Stepan are not considered because they have not changed since 1958. In addition, the thesis assesses three more prerogatives: the role in internal security issues, control of the intelligence apparatus, and the role of civilians and officers in formulating security strategy and defining the roles and missions of the Armed Forces.

#### **D. METHODOLOGY AND IMPORTANCE**

As a single case study, this thesis argues that Venezuela's weak civil-military relations make it an unstable regime vulnerable to breakdown. To demonstrate this argument, this thesis first addresses some selected military prerogatives, and through a chronological comparative study, it assesses how they have changed during the past forty years. Secondly, it applies the ideas of the three approaches of comparative politics to explain the reasons of those changes. Once the study is completed, the thesis hopes to answer two questions: why did civil-military relations deteriorate in Venezuela, and which theoretical approach best explains the causes of those changes.

In that sense, this thesis has a two-fold importance. First, it has a political importance because the possibility of a democratic breakdown in Venezuela could trigger

a reversal of the "third wave" [Huntington] in a region of weak democracies such as Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru. Therefore, understanding the process of deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela is significant. Second, this thesis, in searching for theoretical explanations for the causes of the deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela, could help to reduce a theoretical vacuum in the area of civil-military relations. In the case of Venezuela and the rest of Latin America, there are two main aspects that have been left out of most of the research done by the comparativists in the area of civil-military relations.

First, while the followers of the rational choice, culturalism, and structuralism have focused their studies mostly on three main issues of the civil-military relations: regime breakdown, transition, and consolidation, they have ignored the period of compliance or post-transitional political peace.<sup>18</sup>

The second aspect that has been left out by the students of civil-military relations in Latin America is clearly stated by Wendy Hunter when she argues that:

There is little work been done to compare and appraise the strengths and weaknesses of the different theoretical frameworks that scholars have used to approach the subject of Civil-Military relations. The aspiration to build knowledge depends on appraising existing beliefs, explanations, theories, and approaches. This has yet to occur in an explicit way among scholars of civil-military relations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Fitch, J. Samuel, "Military attitudes Toward Democracy: How do we know if anything is changed?" (Paper for the Conference on "Soldier and Democracy," Riverside, CA, 1999), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Wendy Hunter, "Reason, Culture or Structure? Assessing Civil-Military Relations in Latin America," (paper for the Conference on "Soldier and Democracy," Riverside, CA, 1999), 1.

Each one of the schools of comparative politics assesses the study of politics under its very distinct approach. Rationalists assume that actors, deliberately, seek to maximize their benefits through the selection of those options that will give them the best ratio between cost and benefit. Rational choice followers argue that either as isolated individuals or as an institution, actors try to maximize their benefits. Meanwhile, culturalists argue that traditions, beliefs, and values, rule the life of the actors. These 'rules' becomes the individual and group identities. Finally, structuralists "explore relations among actors in an institutional context."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the academic importance of this thesis lays in its search for a more complete theory of civil-military relations, utilizing an explicit theoretical framework.

#### **E. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

The Chapter II looks at the evolution of civil-military relations in Venezuela from a historical point of view. Here, an analysis of the evolution of the civil-military relations is made. Special emphasis will be made on the two attempts of coup d'état of 1992. These events became a watershed in the democratic history of Venezuela.

Chapter III addresses the issue of military prerogatives. Using the model proposed by Alfred Stepan, this chapter aims to assess the evolution of those prerogatives and the level of changes on them.

Chapter IV addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the each school of thought when they are applied to the analysis of the evolution of the military prerogatives in Venezuela.

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<sup>20</sup> Lichbach, 7.

Finally, Chapter V offers the conclusions on what were the causes of the deterioration of the civil-military relations in Venezuela, and how well the institutional approach explains these causes. In addition it presents alternatives for future theoretical works.

#### **F. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Despite the number of studies in the field of civil-military relations, especially on the topics of regime breakdown, transitions, and consolidation, there is a vacuum of works focused on the post-transitional and post-consolidation period. This becomes a limitation for this thesis because of the lack of empirical evidence to compare with the Venezuelan case. Another limitation is the lack of comparative studies capable of showing strengths and weaknesses of each approach when trying to explain civil-military relations.

## **II. THE CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA FROM 1958 UNTIL 1999**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Civil-military relations in Venezuela cannot be understood without a historical review of the relationship between the two main actors in this political arena: the Presidency and the Armed Forces. These institutions as they exist today, were created at different stages of the formation of the state and under different circumstances. The latter, the Armed Forces, already existed at the dawn of the modern Venezuelan State in 1908. The former, the presidency, was born at the dawn of the democratic era in 1958.

The difference in timing had consequences that, while the Armed Forces evolved into a more professional institution by the implementation of educational programs oriented towards the study of subjects such as strategy, tactics, political sciences, and international security, the presidency became a more personalized and isolated institution. The conflicts of values, traditions, and interests between these two institutions are the driving forces of their relationship. Simultaneously, the absence of other civilian institutions such as Congress or a civilian Ministry of Defense in the scenario of civil-military relations created a political vacuum. There are not moderating actors between the President and the Armed Forces.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the historical evolution of the Armed Forces, the Presidency, and the relationship between them. First, it focuses on the Armed Forces from 1830 to the present. Second, it addresses the institution of the Presidency



assessing its evolution from 1958 until 1999. Finally it evaluates the evolution of civil-military relations in Venezuela addressing the roots of the two military movements of 1992.

## **B. THE ARMED FORCES OF VENEZUELA FROM 1830 UNTIL 1958**

The Armed Forces of Venezuela were born at the dawn of the Independence War in 1810. They were created as a political concept of the "People in Arms."<sup>21</sup> During twenty years of war, the Venezuelan soldiers, under the command of Simón Bolívar, fought for the freedom of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia.

After the death of Bolívar in 1830 and the establishment of the dictatorial regime of José Antonio Páez, the Venezuelan army was dispersed and only one small part of it continued to serve as the President's personal army. The first President was José Antonio Páez. His regime was based on the figure of the strongman, 'Páez: El Caudillo,' and the use of the Army as his Praetorian Guard. The period from the Federal War in 1859 until the Liberal Revolution of Restoration in 1899 is characterized by a military activity dispersed in all regions of the country. The political participation of the military was the result of a system of alliances based on the interests of the caudillos. The "Guerra de Caudillos," as this political struggle was known, delayed the evolution of a modern state. Consequently, Venezuela reached the Twentieth Century in the mist of a rural world as an underdeveloped agrarian society.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Daniels-Hernández, Elías, *Militares y Democracia: Papel de la Institución Armada de Venezuela en la Consolidación de la Democracia*, Caracas, Centauro, 1992, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel-Hernández, 10.

Cipriano Castro in 1899 led the Liberal Revolution of Restoration. Through it Castro achieved the centralization of power. Consequently, the institutions of the modern state began to be structured, including the Armed Forces. From that time, the military became an important part of the backbone column of the Venezuelan State and the basis of the political system of the nation.<sup>23</sup>

However, the Armed Forces did not evolve from a praetorian guard at the service of the strong man to a professional corps of soldiers. On the contrary, the Armed Forces became the source for new authoritarian leaders like Juan Vicente Gómez, Eleazar López Contreras, and Isaías Medina Angarita. Consequently, from 1899 until 1945, Venezuela remained an authoritarian regime.

At the end of WWII, the Armed Forces of Venezuela seemed to be less interested in political participation. The officer's corps felt more identified with the values and ideologies of the new political leadership. Democracy was the name of the ideal political regime. And for those officers, there was no need for the political participation of the military. Moreover, as a consequence of some of the political changes introduced into the international arena by the Treaty of Versailles, such as democratization and the creation of the League of Nations, the Armed Forces of Venezuela began to appreciate the values of democracy in a more relevant manner. After WWI, the Venezuelan officers began to receive a professional education in United States and in Western Europe. Those officers assimilated President Wilson's ideas of democracy, freedom, and justice that came out of the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. After that, an authoritarian regime

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<sup>23</sup> Machillanda-Pinto, José, *"Cinismo Político y Golpe de Estado,"* Caracas, Italgráfica, 1993, 25.

became perceived as unjust and unbearable. In that sense, Vice Admiral Elías Daniels-Hernández states:

The Venezuelan military became aware that the persuasive strength of the democratic system was more efficient than the use of coercive means. Thereby, in democratic regimes it was easier to find channels for satisfying the expectations of the society.<sup>24</sup>

That is why in 1945, a faction of the Army joined the leaders of Acción Democrática (AD) – a Social Democratic party and Comité Politico Electoral Independent (COPEI) – Christian Democratic party and overthrew the regime of General Isaías Medina Angarita.<sup>25</sup>

In 1945, elections were held and Rómulo Gallégo was elected as the first civilian President in this century. Nevertheless, this first democratic attempt only lasted until 1948, when a faction of the army overthrew the elected government and established the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez. This authoritarian regime lasted from 1948 until 1958. Despite the fact that Marcos Pérez Jiménez modernized the Armed Forces and created a more professional officers' corps, the social injustice of the regime and the increase of common values between young officers and the underground political leadership, seeded the democratic values inside of the Armed Forces. Consequently, in January of 1958, a civil-military coup d'état overthrew General Marcos Pérez Jiménez and called for elections in December of that year. It was the dawn of the current democratic era and the birth of the current professional Armed Forces of Venezuela.

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<sup>24</sup> Daniels-Hernández, IX.

<sup>25</sup> Daniels-Hernández, 11.

### C. THE ARMED FORCES AND THE TRANSITION PROCESS OF VENEZUELA'S CURRENT DEMOCRATIC ERA

The transition to the current democratic era in Venezuela was a non-traumatic process, especially when it is compared with similar but more recent processes in Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, and Ecuador. The breakdown of the authoritarian regime of Marcos Pérez Jiménez in January of 1958 was the result of an élite agreement between the two main political parties, Acción Democrática (AD) and Comité Politico Electoral Independiente (COPEI) and the participation of key young officers.

In a civil-military coup d'état, these two sectors overthrew General Marcos Perez Jiménez and established a provisional junta that included three military officers. This junta lasted until October of 1958, when AD, COPEI, and the small Union Republican Democrática (URD) - Democratic Republican Union, signed the Pact of Punto Fijo.

The Pact of Punto Fijo represents what John Higley and Richard Gunter call "an elite settlement,"<sup>26</sup> Here, the party leaders agreed to defend the newly born democracy, disregarding partisan interest on behalf of regime survival. Meanwhile, the Armed Forces stepped out of the political scenario to fight the war against the Castrist guerrillas that were born after the exclusion of the Communist Party from the Pact of Punto Fijo. For this reason, there was not a struggle for power between the Armed Forces and the new political leadership, because as Admiral Elias Daniels-Hernandez stated, "The

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<sup>26</sup> Higley, John and Richard Gunther, Ed., *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*, Cambridge, N.Y., Cambridge University Press, 1992, 19.

Venezuelan Military used the process of transition to emerge victorious from the combat against the guerrilla movement of the 1960's."<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, during the transitional process, the Armed Forces assumed a position characterized by the deliberate renunciation of all personal and institutional interests in favor of the consolidation of the democratic regime. This consolidation was done based on the unity of all the relevant sectors of the society.

The position assumed by the Venezuelan Armed Forces clearly fits the idea of the modes of transition argument stated by Terry Karl. Karl argues that, "Institutional changes shape particular regime transitions in ways that may be especially conducive to (or especially obstructive of) democratization".<sup>28</sup> In particular, when the Armed Forces resigned from the tradition of *caudillismo* and adopted interests directed to the survival of the new regime, they introduced an institutional change favorable to the democratization of the country.

The elite settlement made by the two main parties: COPEI and AD included the URD as well. The Communist Party was left out of the pact. However, this settlement, based on the idea of defending democracy over partisan interests and the acceptance by the Armed Forces of the civilian authority as the means for the regime survival, were the basis for the establishment of the two main actors in the scenario of the civil-military relations. First, the institution of the Presidency of the republic and second, the

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<sup>27</sup> Daniels-Hernández, 65.

<sup>28</sup> Karl, Terry, Lynn, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, 23:9 (October 1990), 6.

institution of the Armed Forces itself. From this moment on, the civil-military interactions would rest in the hands of these two sectors of the society.

#### **D. THE STRONG PRESIDENTIALISM IN VENEZUELA**

One of the most important features of the Venezuelan democratic system is that it is a strong Presidential system. From 1958 until the present, the President has used his constitutionally allocated power in a complex and intertwining manner. First, the President is exempted from party discipline and is not concerned with immediate reelection, which is not allowed in the current constitution. Consequently, the President governs, as he wants. The reasons for this freedom of action are based on the party's internal political interests. First, all the Presidents have been the official head of the party when elected. Second, the party frees the Presidents from party discipline because they manage resources that could be used by the political organization. And third, disloyalty to the President can mean a bad reputation for the party.<sup>29</sup>

The President enjoyed limited legislative powers. But, at the same time, he had unlimited informal powers that allowed him to become the strongest institution in the Venezuelan democratic scenario. Through the use of some of his legislative power, President Rómulo Betancourt was able to establish control over the Armed Forces in 1958. In 1958, the *Junta de Gobierno* created a new Joint Chiefs of Staff. Meanwhile, President Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1976, using the same limited legislative powers, introduced the Organic Law of the National Security and Defense (LOSD). Both of these

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<sup>29</sup> Crisp, Brian, "Presidential Behavior in a System with Strong Parties: Venezuela, 1958-1993," in Scott Mainwaring and Mathew S. Shugart, Eds. *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, Cambridge, NY. Cambridge University Press 1997, 163.

instruments reduced the influence of the Armed Forces in the political system and concentrated the authority in the figure of the President. Rómulo Betancourt and Carlos Andrés Pérez were seeking to concentrate power in the figure of the President. Mainly, because as David Pion-Berlin states, "Concentration of authority in the executive reduces the influence of the Armed Forces."<sup>30</sup>

#### E. CIVILIAN CONTROL OVER THE MILITARY IN VENEZUELA

In 1958, the newly elected President Rómulo Betancourt, made the first attempt to ensure that the Armed Forces would not get involved in politics. His decree number 288 replaced the General Staff by the new Joint Chiefs of Staff and established four autonomous branches. Since then, the power and influence of the Armed Forces have been shared among the Army, Navy, Air Force, and National Guard. The civilian government assumed a quasi-subjective control over the military based on policies of appeasement and "dividing and conquering"<sup>31</sup> By dividing the Armed Forces, the President was able to weaken the military institution by eliminating the unity of command. In addition, the process of promotion and job designation became highly politicized.<sup>32</sup>

Later, in 1961 the newly drafted constitution, clearly established in its article 132 that:

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<sup>30</sup> Pion-Berlin, David, "Civil-Military Circumvention: How Argentine State Institutions Compensate for a Weakened Chain of Command," (paper prepared for delivery at the conference Soldiers & Democracy in Latin America, February 19-20, 1999 at the University of California Riverside, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Burggraaff, Winfield J., *The Venezuelan Armed Forces in Politics, 1935-1959*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995, 187.

<sup>32</sup> Müller-Rojas, Alberto, "Relaciones Peligrosas: Militares, Política y Estado," Caracas, Fondo Editorial Tropikos, 1992, 225.

The National Armed Forces form a nonpolitical, obedient, and nondeliberative institution organized by the state to ensure the national defense, the stability of the democratic institutions, and the respect for the Constitutions and the laws, the observance of which shall always be above any other obligation. The National Armed Forces shall be in the service of the Republic, and in no case in that of any person or political partisanship.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, the promulgation of the Organic Law of the National Armed Forces (LOFAN) in 1961 also regulated the participation of the military in the politics of the country in terms of the apolitical character of the institution.

From 1961 and well into the early 1970's, the Venezuelan Armed Forces were involved in the anti-leftist guerrilla war. In 1973, the Armed Forces were left without a clear mission when a pacification program directed by President Rafael Caldera ended the guerrilla war. At that point, the Armed Forces changed from being a highly operative institution to a more administrative institution. The lack of a threat created the need for new missions that were soon defined. At that time, the Armed Forces began to be used in civilian functions. As part of the government's machinery for the development of the country, the officer's corps was employed more in administrative duties than in operational tasks.

Later, in 1976, President Carlos Andrés Pérez introduced the Organic Law of National Security and Defense (LOSD). This law created the National Security and Defense Council and its Permanent Secretariat "To provide another mechanism for

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<sup>33</sup> Arceneaux, Craig, "Dramatic Consolidation or Reconsolidation? Military Doctrine and the 1992 Military unrest in Venezuela," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 24, (Summer 1996), 73.



civilian influence over the military.”<sup>34</sup> It also established a thirty years career limit and the continuous rotation of superior positions within the Armed Forces. The civilian control became more centralized in the executive, more subjective, and far from the liberal model described by Nordlinger.<sup>35</sup>

In the same year, the service academies upgraded teaching and were authorized to give college degrees to all the graduates from those institutions. The new ‘college degrees’ created the opportunity for the new officers to apply for postgraduate education in political sciences and international relations. This achievement marked the beginning of the Janowitzonian professionalization of the Venezuelan Armed Forces<sup>36</sup>. Some of the officers that received Master’s degree in those areas became more and more concerned with political issues. In the civilian universities, the officers were introduced to liberal ideas and others based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism. In addition, the influence of the left wing parties, evident in most of the public universities in Latin America, seeded in the mind of those officers revolutionary ideas. Suddenly, themes of a political nature were treated in regular conversations in the officer’s mess. Critiques of policy decisions were common and discontent began to flourish. The product of the discontent produced factionalism within the Army which subsequently gave birth to the ‘Movimiento Bolivariano 200’ (MBR200) – Bolivarian Movement 200. This faction of the army attempted a coup against the democratic regime the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> of

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<sup>34</sup> Gil, Antonio, “*El encaje Político de los Militares*,” in ed. Carlos Celis Noguera, *Introducción a la Seguridad y Defensa* (Caracas, Librería Militar, S.A., 1989), 104.

<sup>35</sup> Nordlinger, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Müller-Rojas, 198.

February in 1992 and created the conditions for a new attempt on November 25<sup>th</sup> of the same year. On both occasions, the stability of the democratic regime and the loyalty of the Armed Forces to that regime were tested.

However, one of the most influential factors in the radicalization of the MBR200 was its discontent with the reaction of the government to the riots of February 27, 1989. In the early 1980s', Venezuela, as in many of the countries in Latin America, faced a serious economic crisis. The lack of performance of the government measured as its ability to satisfy the basic needs of the population and the rising expectations of the Venezuelans deteriorated the legitimacy of the regime and created the conditions for social uprisings and the consequent overreaction of the government. The next section of this chapter reviews the economic conditions that produced the events of 1989.

#### **F. THE FAILURE OF THE RENTIER STATE**

Venezuela's economy from 1937 until 1983 was very different from the rest of its Latin American neighbors. The oil revenues, especially those produced in the boom of the oil prices after 1973, created what many Venezuelan called "Venezuela Saudita," a sort of Arabian state in South America. Venezuelans lived under a rentier-state that did not collect any taxes, that subsidized the basic products of the daily food basket, and gave jobs to more than thirty percent of the working class. An inflated national budget undermined norms of efficiency, responsibility, caution, and accountability, and left the state susceptible to varying international policies towards the price of oil<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Karl, Terry Lynn, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Berkeley, CA., University of California Press, 1997, 36.

AD, the most important party in the country, was able to use nepotism and patronage to penetrate the basic institutions of the civil society. It is the most significant example of the culture of clientelism that rose from the structures of the rentier-state. During the process of democratic consolidation, AD managed to politicize labor unions, farmers and ranchers associations, professional colleges, chambers of commerce, and even the Church.- Almost everybody became *adeco*.

AD created a political culture that was different from the Conservative Party and Liberal Party that ruled during the post-colonial period between 1830 and 1889, when Cipriano Castro, leading a group of Revolutionary horsemen from the Andes, took over the government<sup>38</sup>. Gómez prohibited the political parties and suppressed everyone who tried to create a new political organization. Thus AD, COPEI, URD, and the PCV were born underground. But in 1945, when President Medina allowed the political parties, AD was the best-organized and institutionalized of all. *Adecos* gained control of the workers, and established a clientelistic relationship with the élite. Then, during the five years of leadership of Rómulo Betancourt, AD created a corporate state that used the oil revenues to finance a bloated budget that later would fall under the pressure of the fiscal crisis that began in 1973.

Oil prices of the early 1970's raised false hopes in Venezuela. Public expenditures reached new heights, and the budget of 1974 tripled the budget of 1973. Terry Karl states that "In 1989, government expenditures had grown more than 21.7

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<sup>38</sup> Karl, 1997, 36.

times the 1973 levels."<sup>39</sup> To maintain this kind of budget growth, the state had to increase the domestic credits approved by the Congress. In 1983, during the government of Luis Herrera Campins (COPEI), the domestic loans reached twenty five per cent of the original budget, while the government tried to appease the needs of diverse constituents.<sup>40</sup>

From 1979 on the government, also borrowed from external sources. By 1986, the Venezuelan foreign debt reached \$33 billion under President Jaime Lusinchi (AD). This made Venezuela the fourth-largest debtor in Latin America,<sup>41</sup> even though Venezuela had the highest per capita income in Latin America.

To service its debt in 1978, Venezuela paid \$0.43 per each dollar earned on a barrel of oil to foreign banks. Nevertheless, the governments of Carlos Andrés Pérez, Luis Herrera Campins, and Jaime Lusinchi, postponed the economic and political changes needed to face the fiscal crisis. The drop of oil prices in 1983 forced the devaluation of the Bolivar and left the country in the worst economic crisis since the depression of the 1930's. The rentier-state model had failed to satisfy the needs of the constituents of AD and COPEI. The clientelism and corruption had brought Venezuela to the lowest level ever seen as yet. But Venezuelans, hoping that Carlos Andrés Pérez would bring back the prosperity of the early 1970's, elected him President for a second term in December 1988.

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<sup>39</sup> Karl, 1997, 37.

<sup>40</sup> Karl, 1997, 38.

<sup>41</sup> Karl, 1997, 38.

Carlos Andrés Pérez was inaugurated in late January 1989. He surrounded himself with a team of technocrats that recommended a neoliberal solution to the problem. Pérez did not have a majority in Congress, and at that time, even lacked the support of AD<sup>42</sup>. Without any warning, he launched an economic program based on the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The population named this program "El Paquete" (the package), and the government called it "El Gran Viraje" (the great turn around). This economic program comprised, among other things, reduction in the number of public employees, liberalization of prices and free economy, and increases in the price of gasoline. Increasing gas prices immediately forced public transportation fees to rise.

This issue became the main reason for the uprising of the population on the morning of February 28, 1989. Violent riots and looting spread across major cities, and after four days Pérez called in the Armed Forces to restore public order. Two days later peace returned to Caracas and to twenty more cities. The cost: between 1000 and one 1200 deaths.<sup>43</sup> The events of 1989 set the stage for the development of the political crisis of 1992. Until 1989, the character of the crisis seemed to be only economic, because the Presidents from 1973 until 1988, were able to hide the real nature of the problems. However, "El Caracazo," as the events of February 1989 are known, removed the veil that hid reality. National and foreign witnesses saw the decay of the political regime. The

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<sup>42</sup> Machillanda-Pinto, 20.

<sup>43</sup> Schuyler, George W. "Perspectives on Venezuelan Democracy", *Latin American Perspectives*, 23, (Summer 1996), 16.

word "crisis" became common, and for the first time since 1958, the threat of an authoritarian regime became obvious.

The year that followed the "Caracazo" was characterized by more than 400 riots of all types.<sup>44</sup> From student marches to labor strikes, the streets of Caracas and the main cities seemed like battlefields. The civilian police were unable to control the situation. Consequently, Carlos Andrés Pérez ordered the utilization of the Armed Forces to control the riots. From March 1989 until December 1991, the National Guard and the Military Intelligence Apparatus were used in more than 200 occasions to dissolve marches and strikes. The use of the Armed Forces in internal security became an every-day issue. The overreaction of the government to the social discontent and the excessive use of the Armed Forces for controlling popular uprisings delegitimized the regime of Carlos Andrés Pérez and created the conditions for the military uprisings of 1992.

Even though the coup attempts failed, they became a turning point in the history of democracy in Venezuela. This thesis dedicates a complete section of this chapter to the study of those events.

#### **G. THE COUP ATTEMPTS OF 1992**

Until February 1992, the Venezuelan Armed Forces had respected the constitutional precept that forbids them from participating in the political system of the nation. However, at dawn on February 4, 1992, the sounds of heavy machinegun fire, mortars, and the roaring of the engines of the Army tanks awakened the citizens of Caracas. Loyal troops and members of the political police were defending the seat of the

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<sup>44</sup> Müller-Rojas, 190.

government at the palace of Miraflores, and the residence of President Carlos Andrés Pérez, at La Casona. Starting at 11:00 p.m. on February 3<sup>rd</sup> the night before, both sites were under siege by the soldiers of the élite paratroopers' battalion "José Leonardo Chirinos," led by Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias. His intentions were to overthrow the government and establish a provisional civil-military junta<sup>45</sup>.

Meanwhile, at midnight of the same day, in Maracaibo, Maracay, and Valencia, the rebels had taken over the regional government and were in control of all the military units of their respective garrisons, and some vital economic installations. With the exception of Caracas, most of the operational objectives of the rebels were achieved, even though the rebellion was defeated by troops loyal to the democratic regime. For the first time, since the two military uprisings of 1958, a faction of the Venezuelan Army attempted a coup against the democratic system.<sup>46</sup> Felipe Agüero argues that

The uprising reflected the wide-spread discontent among the population and large sectors of the army and was aroused by economic hardship and disgust with political parties and state institutions."<sup>47</sup>

For most of the political and military leaders, the attempted coup d'état came as a complete surprise, especially those who believed that Venezuela had an institutionalized political party system that secured a stable democracy.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, nine months later, a

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<sup>45</sup> Zago, Angela, *"La Rebelión de los Angeles,"* Caracas, Fuentes Editores, 1992, 145.

<sup>46</sup> During the early days of the democratic regime, there were two military uprising, in Puerto Cabello (July 1962) and in Carupano (September 1962), the forces loyal to the government repressed both. See Betancourt, Rómulo, *Venezuela: Oil and Politics,* Trans. Everett Bauman (Boston, MA.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), 95.

<sup>47</sup> Agüero, 1995, 215.

<sup>48</sup> Kornblith, Miriam and David Levine, 45.

second coup attempt, led by Rear Admiral Hernan Gruber Odreman, shook the injured Venezuelan democracy. The forces loyal to the democracy similarly repressed this new attempt.

For many others, the surprise was the failure of the two coup attempts. In that sense Dr. Harold A. Trinkunas argues that:

The attempts of coup were not a surprise for those who were familiar with the deterioration of its democratic regime, what was most surprising was that the coups did not succeed.<sup>49</sup>

In that sense, the lack of support by the population for the coup was a significant fact in the failure of the two attempts. It was no surprise that after the repression the population of Caracas suffered during the riots of 1989. Few citizens of the nation's capital were willing to fight against the forces of the government.<sup>50</sup>

The two coup attempts of 1992 marked a watershed in the history of democracy in Venezuela. Nevertheless, the attempt of February 4<sup>th</sup> is by far the more significant of the two because firstly it happened earlier and had the element of surprise in its favor. Secondly, its leader, Lt. Colonel Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias, was democratically elected

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<sup>49</sup> Trinkunas, Harold A. *"Crafting Civilian Control of the Armed Forces: Statecraft, Institutions, and Military Subordination in Emerging Democracies."* A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Sciences and the Committee on Graduate Studies of the Stanford University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press 1998, 279.

<sup>50</sup> During the repression of the riots of February 1989, there were between one thousand and one thousand and two hundred people killed. See Schuyler, George W. *"Perspectives on Venezuelan Democracy,"* Latin American Perspectives, 23, (Summer, 1996), 16.



the President of Venezuela with 58 percent of the votes<sup>51</sup> approximately seven years later on December 6, 1998.

Both military uprisings revealed a deterioration of the civil-military relation in Venezuela. Thus, after them, "The loyalty of the Armed Forces to the constitutional order may no longer be taken for granted, at least not until the legitimacy of the political elites and institutions is restored."<sup>52</sup>

Despite four decades of uninterrupted democracy, Venezuela faced in 1992, one of the worst moments of its political history. The political scenario that emerged from the two coup attempts in 1992 denoted the lack of civilian supremacy over the military. It was obvious that the model of control established in 1958 and 1961 did not work. The binomial relationship between the President and the Armed Forces based on appeasement and 'Divide and Conquer' did not produce the desired result. The election of Hugo Chávez Frias, a former military officer and his "revolutionary democratic ideas' of a new Republic and a new constitution, have brought back the memories of the authoritarian regimes.

The two coup attempts and the surprising election of Hugo Chávez Frias are the subject of discussion for many scholars. The search for an explanation of these two phenomena has become a priority in order to understand the political situation in

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<sup>51</sup> National Electoral Council, El Universal Digital, "*Resultados de las Elecciones Presidenciales del 06 de Diciembre de 1998*," 07 December 1998. Available [Online]:HYPERLINK "<http://www.eud.com/Elecciones 98>" <http://www.el-universal.com>. [07 December 1998], 2.

<sup>52</sup> Agüero, 1995a, 216.

Venezuela. To define at what point civilian supremacy over the military ceased to exist it is necessary to look at the roots of the military movements that made the two attempts.

### **1. The Bolivarian 200 Army**

The "Ejercito Bolivariano 200" EB-200 (Bolivarian 200 Army) was a faction of the Venezuelan Army created in the Araguan Regiment of Paratroopers, in Maracay, on July 24, 1983. This date marks the bicentennial of the birth of 'The Libertador Simón Bolívar', which is why it is called EB200. This faction was comprised of élite officers that had graduated from the Venezuelan Military Academy in the class of 1975. Among them were Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias, Francisco Arias Cárdenas, and Felipe Acosta Carles. Two of them, Chávez and Arias, 17 years later would be known as the leaders of the Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano 200 (MRB200) Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement.

Craig Arceneaux argues that "The EB200 was created to deal solely with military problems, such as corruption within the higher ranks, budgetary outlays, and politicization of the promotion system."<sup>53</sup> All the officers of the EB200 were known for their devoted admiration to the Bolivarian ideals, their nationalism and for the "outspoken critical approach."<sup>54</sup> In addition, the members of the class of 1975 were the first class, in all the service academies, to graduate with a college degree. This issue separated the officers between college graduates and non-graduates.

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<sup>53</sup> Arceneaux, 70.

<sup>54</sup> Arceneaux, 70.

The goals of the EB200 were markedly changed by the events of February 28, 1989 and the riots of the population against the radical neoliberal policies adopted by the administration of President Carlos Andrés Pérez. During the repression of the popular uprisings, Maj. Felipe Acosta Carles was killed when he hesitated while shooting at a rioter that was looting a supermarket in the west of Caracas.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, Maj. Francisco Arias Cárdenas was in Maracaibo where the police and the National Guard controlled the riots.

In addition, Maj. Hugo Chávez Frias was sick in his house. The death of Maj. Acosta Carles and the fatal results of the riots of February 1989 led the EB200 to evolve into the Movimiento Revolucionario 200. This evolution changed the Bolivarians' goals from a solely military accounting to a broader mission, and thus challenged the government in a civil-military uprising to deal with the socio-economic and political problems of Venezuela. Therefore, after having been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonels and given the command of élite paratroopers battalions, the leaders of the MBR200 attempted coups against the democratic regime of Carlos Andrés Pérez on the evening of February 4, 1992.

As Craig Arceneaux states there was a five-point program that the Bolivarianos had in mind:<sup>56</sup>

1. Put on trial all engaged in corruption (both in the military and in the government).
2. Dissolve all powers of government and call for the election of a constituent assembly.

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<sup>55</sup> Zago, 149.

<sup>56</sup> Arceneaux, 73.

3. Reverse President Pérez's neoliberal policies.
4. Implement an emergency program to combat misery and poverty.
5. Defend the national sovereignty.

Once surrendered, captured, and judged in a summary military court, the leaders of the MBR200 explained their reasons for the insurrection. The major concerns of the rebels were administrative corruption, the use of the Armed Forces to massacre the nation, and the high command trying to be on good terms with politicians.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, the imposition of the neoliberal policies of Carlos Andrés Pérez caused a major effect on the officers of the MBR200. They believed that: "Just as the public resented being asked to make sacrifices by those benefiting from corruption, military officers also questioned the legitimacy of those who sent them to repress discontent."<sup>58</sup>

Based on the five goals of their program, the Bolivarianos argued that they attempted a coup against the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez, because the constitution asked them to do it. "Nos alzamos por la Constitución" (We rebel because of the Constitution).<sup>59</sup>

Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez Frias explained that the insurrection was made to comply with the article 132nd of the constitution that establishes:

The National Armed Forces form a nonpolitical, obedient, and nondeliberative institution organized by the state to ensure the national defense, the stability of the democratic institutions, and the respect for the

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<sup>57</sup> Agüero, 1995a, 222.

<sup>58</sup> Agüero, 1995a, 221.

<sup>59</sup> Ochoa, Enrique, (ed.), *"Nos alzamos por la Constitución: Carta de los Oficiales Bolivarianos,"* (Caracas: Fuentes Editores, 1992, 10.

Constitutions and the laws, the observance of which shall always be above any other obligation. The National Armed Forces shall be in the service of the Republic, and in no case in that of any person or political partisanship.<sup>60</sup>

The members of the MBR200 interpreted this article as follows:

A rule whose objective is to precisely set the path that the armed institution ought to follow in those exceptional circumstances in which the subversion of the constitutional and legal order have taken place in the powers of the state across a tyrannical and illegitimate executive, a legislature without popular representation and a corrupt and corrupting judicial authority.<sup>61</sup>

With the five-points program and the 132<sup>nd</sup> article of the Constitution of Venezuela, Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez Frias, justified the rebellion of February 4, 1992 with the following arguments:

1. While the constitution holds that the military had the duty to "ensure the democratic stability", the MBR200 believes its duty to evaluate whether or not the government is democratic. Considering that the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez was illegitimate, the MBR200 decided to remove him from office.
2. Points three and four of the program are related to the National Security and Defense, because the neoliberal policies threaten the expanded role of the Armed Forces in the development of the country and do little to arrest the deteriorating economic situation of the military personnel. Besides, the proposals of the IMF are an invasion of our national sovereignty.
3. Finally, the willingness of President Pérez to negotiate with Colombia on border issues, became a matter of national sovereignty. Therefore, it was the constitutional duty of the MBR200 to maintain the territorial integrity of the nation.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Arceneaux, 73.

<sup>61</sup> Ochoa, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Zago, 150.

The unique interpretation of the 132<sup>nd</sup> article of the constitution, by the member of the MBR200, marks a definitive rupture between them and the higher levels of the military organization. Craig Arceneaux argues that "If the military institution is fragmented, the doctrine is unlikely to be disseminated in a coherent fashion, and it is open for reinterpretation."<sup>63</sup> If the doctrine is not disseminated in a coherent fashion, the military power decreases because it creates a split within the officer corps, based on a different interpretation of the doctrine. In addition, Arceneaux argues that in Venezuela, the civilians saw the decrease of the military power as an increase of civilian power, which thus worked to fragment the command structure and the unity of the military. The civilians interpreted this fragmentation as the effect of the 'dividing and conquering' policies. But, instead the military was divided within its officer corps, creating crevasses where the orders and doctrines were misinterpreted. Moreover, Harold Trinkunas argues that "While institutionalized 'Divide and conquer' policies towards the military shielded the democratic regime, they also had certain perverse consequences, particularly once the divisions between junior and senior officers became extreme."<sup>64</sup>

In addition to the idea of a division within the officers corps, Felipe Agüero observed that: "The experience of several decades of undeniable military subordination to constitutional democratic authority made the government deaf to threats of violent

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<sup>63</sup> Arceneaux, 75.

<sup>64</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 308.

military actions against the established regime.”<sup>65</sup> That is why the coup attempt of February 4, 1998 was a surprise to most of the political leaders of the country.

## **2. The 5th of July Movement**

While Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarianos were in jail, Rear Admiral Hernan Gruber Odreman and General Efraín Visconti Osorio, prepared a new coup attempt where the Naval Infantry and the Air Force would take the government with the help of some of the Bolivarianos who were not captured on February 4<sup>th</sup>. This new conspiracy was called “Movimiento 5 de Julio” (Movement July 5th). They took this name from the date of independence of Venezuela.

On November 27, 1998, the Movimiento 5 de Julio launched its attack against the palace of Miraflores. But, this time, President Pérez had the information concerning the new rebellion, because one of the officers very close to Rear Admiral Gruber Odreman, decided to inform the government about the rebellion. On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, loyal troops defeated the uprising. “Leaving at least 232 dead and 1,200 members of the Armed Forces, including 500 officers arrested, General Visconti fled to Peru with one hundred members of the movement, while Rear Admiral Gruber surrendered and was captured.”<sup>66</sup>

The coup attempt of November 27, 1998 showed that civil-military relations in Venezuela were in a precarious state. President Carlos Andrés Pérez was wrong when he

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<sup>65</sup> Agüero, 1995b, 215.

<sup>66</sup> Schuyler, 16.

argued in December 1992 that "the failure of the coup attempt of November ended the cycle of coups in Venezuela in a definitive manner."<sup>67</sup>

The two military uprisings of 1992 clearly show that civilian control over the military had weakened since January 1958. Moreover, Agüero states "These events revealed that, behind the appearance of the subordination and respect for the constitutional order that evolved gradually over the previous decades, a defiant mood had been mounting in the Armed Forces."<sup>68</sup>

### **3. Reasons for the Failure of the Two Coups Attempts**

Both coup attempts in 1992 failed mainly because the forces loyal to the government followed the orders of the high command and were able to repress the rebellions. The lack of support by the civilian population for the two uprisings is also a significant factor that caused their defeat. Dr. Harold Trinkunas argues that while poor planning was the cause of the failure of the February 4<sup>th</sup> rebellion, "The difficulty of organizing a coup attempt across traditional divides between the services was the principal cause for the failure of the November 27<sup>th</sup> rebellion."<sup>69</sup> This, the same civil policy of 'dividing and conquering' that caused the split within the officer corps, now caused the defeat of the rebel movement and impeded the unification of efforts among the members of the four branches that planned the November 27<sup>th</sup> attempt.

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<sup>67</sup> Agüero, 1995a, 216.

<sup>68</sup> Agüero, 1995a, 216.

<sup>69</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 323.



Neither Agüero nor Trinkunas, and even Arceneaux, consider that the early information released by one of the members of the staff of Rear Admiral Hernan Gruber Odreman was a significant factor in the defeat of that movement. LCDR José Marnrique Padrón, two days before the events, revealed the plan of the coup to the Commander of the Venezuelan Navy. This revelation allowed the government to seize the Venezuelan National Television station and forbade the rebels to play the tape prepared by the leaders of the rebellion. In this tape Rear Admiral Hernan Gruber Odreman and his colleagues presented the political 'manifesto' of their rebellion. Instead, a tape where a poorly dressed officer, surrounded by two precariously outfitted guerrilla members, asking for the popular rebellion, was played. Today, the origins of this tape are still not clear. Angela Zago in her book *"The Rebellion of the Angels"* argues that the tape was prepared at the Direction of Military Intelligence by forces loyal to the government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez.<sup>70</sup> If that is true, the tape served its purpose. When the general population saw the looks of the rebels on television, they decided to stay in their homes, avoiding a massacre like the one on February 29, 1989.

Even though the two rebellions were defeated, the core of the Armed Forces was split. Some officers, especially the more senior, decided that they had more to lose by supporting a new attempt against the government than by defeating a new rebellion. Meanwhile, among the younger officers a "Conspiracy against the government was an

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<sup>70</sup> Zago, 158.

attractive proposition in the abstract, yet participating in a coup itself was a risky proposition, possibly leading to the loss of their careers, or even their lives.”<sup>71</sup>

The military uprisings were defeated. Nevertheless, some of the members of the Bolivarianos were kept in service, mainly because they were obeying orders from their superiors or because they never had been discovered as participants in the conspiracy.

Later, in March 1993, the Congress of Venezuela impeached President Pérez for the misuse of \$17M to provide security services to Violeta Chamorro, the President of Nicaragua<sup>72</sup>. The rebellion of the Bolivarianos failed, but the first point of their program to put on trial all those engaged in corruption, both in the military and in the government, was partially accomplished with the impeachment of President Pérez.

#### **4. ¡Por Ahora! (¡Just for Now!)**

At noon on the 4th of November of 1992, Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez Frias, leader of the MBR200, decided to surrender to the forces loyal to the regime. Nevertheless, he asked the Minister of Defense, Army General Fernando Ochoa Antich, to let him go on National Television because that would be the only way that the rebels in the other three cities would surrender. The Minister of Defense, seeking to avoid more bloodshed, allowed Lt. Colonel Chávez to give a 30 second speech on national television. Those 30 seconds would change the history of Venezuela.

Around 1 p.m. on November 4, 1992, a sharp looking paratrooper appeared on national television. His well fitted uniform, his red beret, and his airs of “Llanero”

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<sup>71</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 326.

<sup>72</sup> Müller-Rojas, 210.

(cowboy from the plains) outshone the image of a poorly shaved and sloppily uniformed Chief of Joint Staff, Vice Admiral Daniels Hernández. But, it was not only the image of Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez that impressed the general population of the country; it was his speech. The author here translates the content of his speech:

First of all, I want to wish a good day to all the people of Venezuela and, this Bolivarian message is directed to the brave soldiers that are in the Regiment of Paratroopers of Aragua, and the Armor Brigade of Valencia.

¡Comrades!

Sadly... [By] *now*... the objectives that we pursued were not achieved in the capital. It means that, we here in Caracas, did not achieve control. You did a good job there. But, it is time to avoid more bloodshed. It is time for reflection, there will be new opportunities and the country has to take the better course. Listen to my words, listen to the Comandante Chávez, that launches you this message so you give up the weapons, because the objectives planned nationally would not be possible now.

¡Comrades!

Listen to this message of solidarity, I thank you for your loyalty, I thank you for your valor, and your unselfishness and *I, before all the country, assume the responsibility of the Bolivarian Military Movement.*<sup>73</sup>

The speech of Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez had two main ideas that marked the minds of most Venezuelans. For the people living in poverty conditions – around 80 percent of the Venezuelan population,<sup>74</sup> the word *by now* seeded hope in their hearts. For

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<sup>73</sup> Words pronounced by Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez Frias in national television the fourth of February of 1,992, El Universal Digital, "*Direction Nacional Político-Electoral del Movimiento V República*," 10 October 1998. Available [Online]:HYPERLINK "<http://www.4f.org/4febrero.htm>" <http://www.el-universal.com>. [10 October 1998], 1.

<sup>74</sup> El Universal Digital, "*Pobreza Crítica in Venezuela*," 01 January 1998. Available [Online]:HYPERLINK "<http://www.eud.com/Elecciones98>" <http://www.el-universal.com>. [29 July 1998], 1.

the rest of the country, the words *I, before all the country, assume the responsibility of the Bolivarian Military Movement*, meant that for the first time, since 1958, that someone assumed publicly, responsibility for something. That speech marked the birth of the Movimiento V República (MVR) -Movement Fifth Republic.<sup>75</sup> The MVR would be the political party that on December 6, 1998 brought Lt. Colonel Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias to the Presidency of Venezuela.

The leaders of the MBR200 and the Movement 5th of July were incarcerated until March 1994. That year, Rafael Caldera, elected in December 1993, "Issued a Presidential pardon for all soldiers convicted of participating in the 1992 coups on the premise condition that these officers retire immediately from the Armed Forces."<sup>76</sup>

However, President elect Hugo Chávez has promised to forget all the desires for revenge and to keep the Armed Forces together.<sup>77</sup> If this is true, it will be a first step forward to increase the control of civilian power over the military. Contrarily, it would create a new split in the officer corps that could weaken the military institution to a point of polarizing it, increasing the risk of new military unrest.

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<sup>75</sup> It is the Fifth Republic because the first was lost to the Spaniards in 1811. The second was lost to the dictatorship of José Antonio Páez in 1830. The third republic was lost in the Coup of 1945 against President Isaías Medina Angarita. The fourth republic was lost in the coup of 1948 against President Rómulo Gallégo. The leader of the MBR200 argues that the government from 1958 until February 04, 1998 was not a legitimate republic, therefore his movement is the Fifth Republic.

<sup>76</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 330.

<sup>77</sup> El Universal Digital, "*Presidente electo hace un llamado a la unidad*," 07 December 1998. Available [Online]:HYPERLINK "<http://www.eud.com>" <http://www.el-universal.com>. [07 December 1998], 1.

## H. CONCLUSIONS

The coup attempts on February 4<sup>th</sup> and November 27<sup>th</sup> in 1992 added a military dimension to the crisis of the democratic regime in Venezuela. These two military uprisings demonstrated that civilian control over the military had been weakened.

As Miriam Kornblith and Daniel Levine argue,

The attempted coups in 1992 revealed deep divisions in the Armed Forces -above all, a split between younger officers committed to radical change and those, at the ranks of colonel and above who remained loyal to the system.<sup>78</sup>

These young officers were willing to sacrifice their careers and lives in order to establish a new regime that they considered more democratic. Such a determination was based on strong nationalism, opposition to the corruption, and the emergence of a new leadership generation.

The new values of the younger officers, combined with what Felipe Agüero defines as

The reproach of the top military leaders, the enhanced military sensitivity to popular discontent, and the reactions to the deterioration of civilians institution, made it possible for military discontent to be transformed into actual coup attempts.<sup>79</sup>

The explanations for the coup attempt on February 4, 1992 can be found inside the EB200. A group of young Army officers, members of the same class, shared values that drove them to attempt a coup against democracy for the good of the system.<sup>80</sup> Even though the two coup attempts failed, they became a watershed in the history of the

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<sup>78</sup> Kornblith, 71.

<sup>79</sup> Agüero, 1995a, 226.

<sup>80</sup> Words of Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez Frias in Angela Zago, "*La Rebelión de los Angeles*", 32.

Venezuelan Democracy. First, they set the stage for the impeachment of President Pérez. Second, they seeded the hope for a better regime in the hearts of the most needy Venezuelans. And finally, the leaders of the MRB200 were able to integrate the values, beliefs and needs of the great majority of the Venezuelan population.

After being released from jail, Hugo Chávez Frias founded the *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (MVR). This new political party was made with the coalition of all the left wing parties and the members of the MBR200. During the political campaign for the election of Congress and for the Presidential election, the MVR exploited the revolutionary ideas of the MBR200. Using the five-points program of the Bolivarianos, Chávez was able to convince the voters. Consequently, on December 6, 1998, the voters elected the President the leader of the Movimiento Revolucionario 200.

Such political phenomena disprove the theories of an institutionalized party system, and bring back the idea of an inchoate political system. However, the most significant lesson taught by the Bolivarianos is that the civil policy of 'dividing and conquering', can be counterproductive. When this policy is applied without prudence, it divides the Armed Forces to the extreme of creating splits that weaken the institution and endanger the democratic regime.

Even though the MVR achieved the goals of the Bolivarianos, the Armed Forces are still in a critical situation. Moreover, the resurgence of the officers involved in the two coup attempts could create hatred within the officers' corps that would worsen the situation of the Armed Forces.

The victory of the MBR200, now the MVR, in the Presidential elections, allows the achievement of most of the goals of the former MBR200, and the Armed Forces are still under the weak control of civilians authorities. Moreover, those officers that defended the regime in 1992 now face the uncertainty, that the members of the MBR200 that were neglected during the years after the 1992 attempts, would thus enjoy the prerogatives of having a Commander in Chief a founder of the Movimiento Revolucionario 200.

Elected President Hugo Chávez Frias is not only inheriting a bankrupted country. He faces the most challenging situation that any Venezuelan President has encountered. His ideals, his beliefs, and overall his sense of unity, would be the only tools that he could use to bring Venezuela back to its best years. If he does not unify the country, and all its institutions, the very survival of the Venezuelan democracy will be in peril.

### III. THE CHANGES IN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA

#### A. INTRODUCTION

There are at least two conclusions that can be drawn from the material presented in the first two chapters of this thesis about the democratic crisis that Venezuela has lived since 1989. The first conclusion to be reached is the incapability of the government to satisfy the expectations of the population produced by the failures of the economic policies of the rentier-state. This lack of performance of the government created what Juan J. Linz defines as a 'legitimacy crisis'<sup>81</sup>. The second conclusion addresses the deterioration of civilian control over the military evidenced by the two coup attempts of 1992.

Of these two causes, this thesis addressed only the issue of civil-military relations.<sup>82</sup> The main argument of this chapter is that in Venezuela there have been critical changes in the capacity of the military to extend influence to the political arena. There is a trend to increase the presence of active military officers in economic, social, judiciary, and even political arenas. In that sense, Alfred Stepan argues there are certain key dimensions that once under the control of the military, tilt the balance of power

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<sup>81</sup> Linz, Juan J. *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration*. Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, 16.

<sup>82</sup> The issue of the economic failures and its legitimacy crisis are well covered by Jennifer McCoy and Williams Smith in the book *Venezuela: Democracy Under Stress*. Coral Gables, FL.: University of Miami North-South Center, 1995. Updated in Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Berkley, CA, University of California Press, 1997.



toward the Armed Forces. He defines these dimensions as prerogatives that once under the control of the military, give them advantages over their civilian counterparts.<sup>83</sup>

This chapter addresses some key dimensions of the Venezuelan political arena and it assesses their evolution in the last four decades. Beginning with the model presented by Alfred Stepan in his work *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone*, this thesis seeks to explain whether these key dimensions changed in favor of the military, and if so, by how much.<sup>84</sup>

These dimensions are:

1. Military relationships to the Head of the state.
2. Active-duty participation in the cabinet.
3. Role of senior servants or civilian political appointees.
4. Role of civilian authorities in military promotion.
5. Role of the military in state enterprises.
6. Role of the military in internal security issues.
7. Control of the intelligence apparatus.
8. Role of civilians and officers in formulating security strategy and defining the roles and missions of the Armed Forces.

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<sup>83</sup> Stepan, Alfred, *"Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone."* Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1988, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Stepan, 1978, 3.

## **B. THE ALFRED STEPAN MODEL AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE MILITARY PREROGATIVES IN VENEZUELA**

The framework presented by Alfred Stepan is based on an eleven-prerogative matrix.<sup>85</sup> This framework can be used to assess the relative strength of civil and military institutions by analyzing who has the greater control over those prerogatives. Here, each factor is rated low, moderate, or high. A lower military score in any prerogative will indicate that the civilians control that prerogative. At the end, the sum total of these prerogatives will give an indication of the balance of strength between the military and the civilian institutions. It will consider only the prerogatives mentioned above.

The study of the prerogatives in Venezuela is divided into three periods. The first period is the dawn of the Constitution of 1961, and the promulgation of the Organic Law of the Armed Forces. The second occurs in 1992 before the two coup attempts. Finally, the third period is in 1999 at the beginning of President Chávez's administration.

### **1. Military Relationships to the Head of the State**

Alfred Stepan states in this prerogative the strong control of civilians is given by the fact that the "Chief executive is de jure and de facto commander in Chief."<sup>86</sup> In the case of Venezuela this is true. For most of the four decades of the democratic regime, the loyalty and subordination of the Armed Forces to the figure of the President has been a given. The democratic spirit of the military in Venezuela has been tested on several occasions. First, during the early stages of the democratic regime the Armed Forces proved to be loyal to the President and engaged in the fight against the leftist guerrillas

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<sup>85</sup> Stepan, 1978, 7-12.

<sup>86</sup> Stepan, 1978, 94.

seeking to overthrow the new democratic regime and install a Communist regime based on the Cuban model. This spirit was also tested again in the defeat of military uprisings in Carúpano and Puerto Cabello in 1962 and in seeking to overthrow the regime and establish a new military dictatorship. Third, in 1992 the main body of the military remained loyal to President Pérez and defeated the insurrections of February and November of that year. Finally, during the electoral process on 1998 the Armed Forces proved to be loyal to President Caldera and to the democratic regime by supporting the elections and allowing the process to be completed under normal and peaceful conditions. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the two coup attempts of 1992 are considered violations of the loyalty and subordination of a faction of the Armed Forces with respect to the Commander in Chief.

The events of February 4<sup>th</sup> and November 27<sup>th</sup> in 1992 represent the return of military interventionism to the political arena in Venezuela. Until that date the Armed Forces had not only been a significant instrument in the survival of a civilian regime of consensual character, but in fact the Venezuelan military had been a fundamental factor in the process of "political modernization in Venezuela during the Twentieth Century."<sup>87</sup> Consequently, the two coup attempts of 1992 represent an abrupt change in the behavior of the Armed Forces. They represent a radical instance of *articulated military contestation*.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Müller-Rojas, 67.

<sup>88</sup> Alfred Stepan defines *articulated military contestation* as the unwanted response of the military against the policies of the civilian democratic leadership. See Stepan, 1978, 68.

The two coup attempts are the most significant representation of disobedience of a faction of the military towards their Commander in Chief. Thereby, for that period, this prerogative is considered moderate. For the rest of the period, the loyalty of the Armed Forces to the President is taken for granted. Consequently, from 1961 until 1992, and from 1993 until present day this prerogative is considered low.

## **2. Active-Duty Military Participation in the Cabinet**

In Venezuela, during most of the period studied, the only active-duty military in the cabinet was the Minister of Defense. All the Presidents since 1958 have considered it a 'healthy' tradition to appoint a military officer as Minister of Defense. This tradition has meant that the general or admiral appointed to this cabinet position by necessity, becomes a politician; in order to play the bureaucratic game within the cabinet. At the same time, the presence of an officer as Minister of Defense weakens the power of the Chairman of Joint Chiefs Staff. This is the case since the Minister of Defense is not only the head of the military branch of the executive power, but also the highest-ranking active officer in the Armed Forces. Thus, his presence reduces the cohesion within the Armed Forces, making the Joint Chiefs of Staff an administrative figure. In addition, there is an Inspector General of the Armed Forces who, in the vertical structure of the Ministry of Defense is directly below the Minister of Defense and above the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Staff. Figure 1 shows how the higher level of the Military High Command is organized.

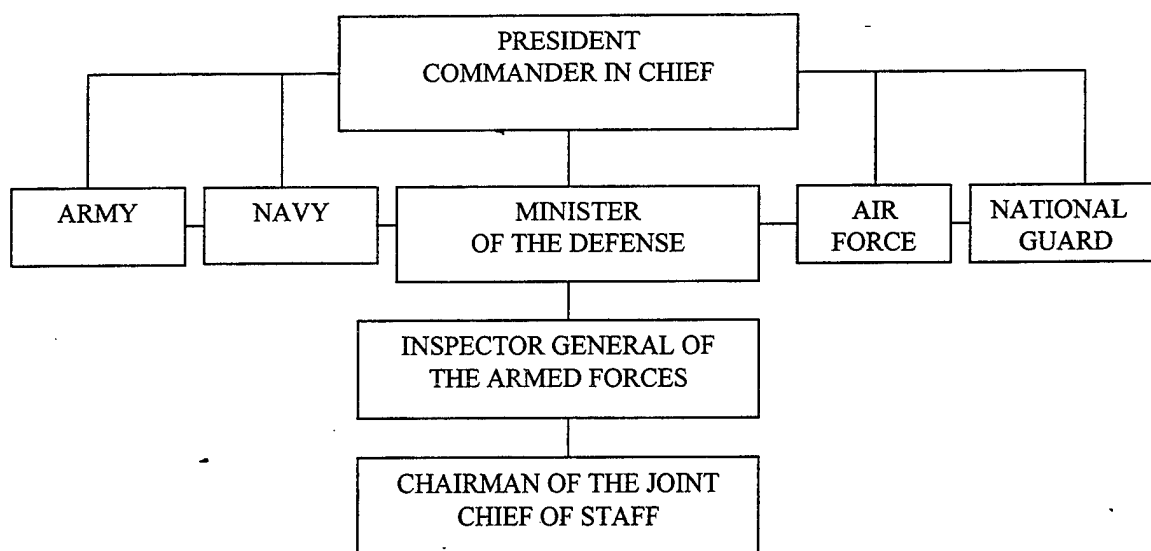


Figure 1. Military High Command of Venezuelan.

Thereby, the Joint Chiefs of Staff is included within the Ministry of Defense. Consequently, the high political character of the Minister of Defense and the loss of operational character of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has created the need for an operational command. This command is called *Comando Unificado de las Fuerzas Armadas* – Unified Command of the Armed Forces, which creates a higher level of bureaucratic complexity and reduces the cohesiveness of the Armed Forces.

Until 1999, the active-duty military participation in the Cabinet was considered a moderated prerogative. Nevertheless, in January 1999 President Chávez appointed a general as Minister of the Secretary of the Presidency. Thus, two active duty officers are part of his cabinet. Consequently, this prerogative is now considered high.

### 3. Role of Senior Career Civil Servants or Civilian Political Appointees

The only civilians that work in the higher levels of the Armed Forces are mostly retired officers that work as advisors for the high-ranking officers. There are few other

civilian employees. Some of them work as intelligence analysts and some of them work at the Logistic and Supply Directorate of the Ministry of Defense, but their duties are solely administrative. Given the absence of civilian appointees in the higher structures of the institutions, the Organic Law of National Security and Defense (LOSD) of 1976 created the Institute for Superior Studies of National Defense (IAEDEN). The mission of the IAEDEN was to integrate "The military and the élites from academia, business, political parties, and other groups."<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, this interaction has only been developed as part of the academic exercises of the Superior Course of National Security and Defense,<sup>90</sup> and not as a mechanism to increase the presence of civilian appointees in the Armed Forces.

The main reason for the absence of civilian servants or political appointees in any high position within the military is the low salaries paid in the military administration that make these positions less attractive than some jobs in the civilian administration. Consequently, the high level positions are occupied only by active officers. Therefore, this prerogative is rated high for the military during all the considered periods.

#### **4. Role of Civilian Authorities in Military Promotions**

In the case of the military promotions in Venezuela, the political leadership has granted autonomy to the commanders of each service for the handling of the promotion process for those ranks that represent the lower and medium levels of the military career. Therefore, the respective branch commanders promote all the NCOs and the officers up

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<sup>89</sup> Arceneaux, 65.

<sup>90</sup> Andersen, Robert B. *Civilian Control of Professionalizing Militaries; Implications of the Venezuelan Case*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Denver, CO: University of Denver Press, 1985, 135.

to the rank of lieutenant colonel and Navy commanders. In the case of colonel, Navy captains and above, the politicians have played a discretionary role. The list of officers to be promoted is created based on the order of merit of the professional qualifications of each individual officer. Then the Ministry of Defense and the Joints Chiefs of Staff prepare the lists. The promotion lists of all the colonels, Navy captains, generals, and admirals are reviewed and signed by the President, and approved by Congress. Nevertheless, neither the chief executive nor the legislative branch has legal power to include any officer in the promotion list.

Despite this fact, retired General Alberto Muller-Rojas argues that: "During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the promotion process became very controversial. The inclusion of officers in the promotion lists by the Chief Executive created serious criticism within the Armed Forces."<sup>91</sup> In this regard, Felipe Agüero states that "the harmful effects of party influence, particularly in regard to the violation of the professional norms and internal autonomy of the military, also provoked criticism."<sup>92</sup>

Alfred Stepan argues that the ideal condition is that civilians have more control in the promotion process, but in Venezuela, the civilians have created an aberration of this prerogative, and their influence in the process has provoked splits that dangerously weaken the Armed Forces.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Müller-Rojas, 232.

<sup>92</sup> Agüero, 1995a, 223.

<sup>93</sup> Müller-Rojas, 23.

In an attempt to make this process less susceptible to politicization, the lists of candidates for promotion are kept under wraps until the President has had the chance to see them. This reduces the possibility of intervention of politicians in the early stages of the process. There have been cases where influential members of political parties and congressmen had tried to introduce names of their 'favorites' in those lists before they reached the office of the President. However, the secrecy surrounding the process of the elaboration of the promotion lists has reduced these incidents. In addition, it has favored a greater control by the military in the promotion process.

Consequently, given the high degree of autonomy that the military has in the promotion process, this prerogative is rated high for the military during the entire studied period.

#### **5. Role of the Military in State Enterprises**

The presence of active-duty officers in state enterprises is significant, from the Instituto de Nacional de Canalizaciones (an autonomous institution in charge of maritime channels and navigable rivers), to many others ministerial directorates and autonomous institutes where active-duty officers are appointed given the strategic character of those enterprises. Some of them are the Direction of Ground Transportation, Direction of Air Transportation, Direction of Ports, Direction of Customs, Direction of Civil Aeronautics, and Direction of Air Control.

This prerogative can be rated moderate during the entire period prior to 1999. However, the inclusion of active officers in state enterprises has increased with the assumption of Hugo Chávez as President. Some of the new appointees, among others,



are Director of Government Budget, Vice-President of Venezuelan Petroleum Company, Director of Culture, and Vice-Minister of Education. These appointments can be explained by the need of the President to have close associate as public servants. Thereby, he selected his former comrades and classmates to those positions of confidence. According to these facts, this prerogative is rated high for the 1999 period.

The inclusion of military officers in state enterprises is a common practice of the democratic regime in Venezuela. The educational level of many military officers is higher than most of the middle class Venezuelans. The effectiveness, efficacy, discipline, and dedication are characteristics of the military that assure the productivity levels and the stability of many of the public institutions of the country. Thereby, political leaders have used this 'human resource' to cope with economic, labor, and productivity crises.

#### **6. Role of the Military in Internal Security Issues**

Most of the states in Venezuela have a police force that functions under the control of the governor and the Ministry of the Interior. However, senior and field officers from the National Guard are appointed as Commanders of the various state police. In addition, since 1961, the National Guard has been involved in the control of student riots. Later, during the late 1980s and the early 1990, the Armed Forces had been used heavily to control social uprising, and all kinds of protests. Thus, the control of the police actions fell into the hands of the Armed Forces.<sup>94</sup> This prerogative is rated moderate for the military during the period prior to 1999.

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<sup>94</sup> Sonntag, Heinz and Thaís Maingón, *Venezuela 4F-1992*, Caracas, Editorial Nueva Sociedad, 1992, 18.

Currently, the President has appointed retired officers as directors of the Judicial Technical Police and Municipal Police Force. Likewise, in March 1999, he appointed a former Army general as the Head of the Political Police. Thereby, all the police forces in the country are under the control of active officers or retired officers. Thus, this prerogative shifted from moderate to high in 1999.

#### **7. Control of the Intelligence Apparatus**

Since 1961, there have been two main agencies that have controlled the intelligence apparatus in Venezuela. First, there is a civilian organization known as the Direction of the Services of Intelligence and Prevention (DISIP). It is a political police under the control of the Ministry of Interior. There are also two military agencies: the Direction of Military Intelligence (DIM) and the Intelligence Direction of the Joint Chiefs Staff (DIVINTEL)<sup>95</sup>. Even though each branch of service has its departments of intelligence, the results of their efforts is mostly for internal purposes.

During almost 40 years, the DISIP has retained its mission of producing combat intelligence to cope with rural leftist movements in the early 1960s and urban guerrillas during the 1980s. Also it employs a lot of material and human resources to detect possible rebel cells within the Armed Forces. Secondly, the role of military intelligence has been to produce strategic and combat intelligence for the use of the Armed Forces. During the early 1960s the DIM was called the Service of Intelligence of the Armed Forces (SIFA). During this period the main effort of the SIFA was to be against the leftist guerrillas and to hunt for possible rebel officers within the Armed Forces. In the

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<sup>95</sup> Machillanda-Pinto, 62.

1980s, the renamed DIM was devoted to providing military intelligence to the Armed Forces. This intelligence was to be used to cope with the incursion of a Colombian corvette in the Gulf of Venezuela during the summer of 1987. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was the belief that hunting for rebel officers was no longer needed. In 1991 the DIM, under the direction of General Herminio Fuenmayor, was involved in political 'espionage'. The main mission of this military organization was distorted and corruption flourished within this institution until the dismissal of General Fuenmayor.<sup>96</sup>

Currently, President Chávez appointed a retired officer as director of the DISIP. This fact, in addition to the presence of a retired officer as the director of the Judicial Technical Police, leave the control of the intelligence apparatus in the hands of military officers both retired and active. This prerogative is rated moderate for the military during the studied period between 1961 until 1992. However for 1992 and 1999 it was rated high for the military.

#### **8. Role of Civilians and Officers in Formulating Security Strategy and Defining the Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces**

During the transition process of the 1960s, both the political leadership and the high-ranking officers formulated the security strategy and defined the roles and missions of the Armed Forces. With the rise of the leftist guerrilla movement that resulted from the exclusion of the Communist Party from the Pact of Punto Fijo, the mission of the Armed Forces was clearly defined: fight against the insurgency. The fight against subversion allowed the military to demonstrate their professional capacity for

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<sup>96</sup> Müller-Rojas, 118.

guaranteeing the stability of the democratic regime while maintaining their operational autonomy.<sup>97</sup>

Nevertheless in 1973, the process of pacification initiated by President Rafael Caldera brought the fighting to an end. The victory of the Armed Forces over the insurgency enhanced their professional standing and prestige allowing them to maintain a high degree of autonomy within the narrow area of the state policy they controlled.<sup>98</sup> According to Harold Trinkunas, after 1973 in the arena of external defense, the military operated with little civilian oversight: "Maintaining bureaucratic autonomy and a free hand in the areas of training, organization, and planning."<sup>99</sup>

During the last 25 years, the formulation of security strategy and the definition of the roles and missions of the Armed Forces have been in the hands of the military. The end of the counter-insurgency war left the Armed Forces without a clear mission. Consequently, many officers began to search for new roles and tasks. In this sense, the external defense role became insufficient and the military began to get involved in the development of the country. To achieve this goal, the military used the autonomy gained during the early 1960s and formulated reforms in the educational system, mission, and legislation governing the Armed Forces.<sup>100</sup> For example, military officers were granted college degrees from the military academies and they were authorized to continue

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<sup>97</sup> Daniels-Hernández, 65.

<sup>98</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 285.

<sup>99</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 286.

<sup>100</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 287.

postgraduate studies in political science and in other fields outside of the professional military arena. All these changes were made within the Armed Forces without consulting the civilian authorities.<sup>101</sup>

The search for a new mission had its unwanted consequences. As a result of this search Harold Trinkunas argues:

While civilian politicians enacted the formal legislation permitting these reforms, they undermined them in practice, preventing a substantial *de facto* expansion in military jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the reforms subtly altered the attitudes of military officers towards democracy, development, and their role within the political system. Many officers overlooked the contradictions between their actual role and potential role in society so long as increasing defense budgets made possible larger outlays for salaries, benefits, and military procurement. However, the military reforms of the 1970s had unintended consequences, creating a new generation of Venezuelan officers with a populist, equity-dividing and utilitarian view of democracy, and a latent capacity of political activism.<sup>102</sup>

The argument of Professor Trinkunas is quite accurate. However, if the military is the only significant actor playing a relevant role in the formulation of the security strategy, missions and roles it is because the civilian leadership has shown no interest in issues of national security and defense. Furthermore, in his work Professor Trinkunas cites and interview with General Alberto Muller-Rojas where this officer states:

Democratic national security doctrine became the dominant paradigm in the key planning institutions of the Armed Forces and the upper echelons of the officer corps, but it never acquired a significant following among civilian government officials.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 288.

<sup>102</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 287.

<sup>103</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 290.

The lack of civilian interest of National Security issues represents a partial failure of the purpose of the Institute for Superior Studies of National Defense (IAEDEN). The course thought in the IAEDEN has served only for the personal improvement of some civilians and not for the creation of a corps of civilian servants within the Armed Forces.

This fact explains why the role of the legislature and even of the executive in this matter is minor. Thereby, this prerogative is considered high in favor of the military during all the period studied.

### **C. ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS**

Alfred Stepan explains that a low prerogative is de jure and de facto effective control of the civilians over the military. A moderate prerogative will indicate a balance between the military and the civilians in the control of that specific factor. And finally, a high prerogative is an indication of the control of the Armed Forces over the civilians.

Based on the rating established by Alfred Stepan, Table 1 shows how the balance of strength varied between the civilians and the military during the selected periods.

One conclusion that is obvious and can be noticed immediately is that the military seems to have increased certain privileges that could give them advantages over their civilian counterpart. However, a more careful analysis of the findings shows that the military did not seek the control of those key dimensions. Those extended privileges were given to the military by the civilian authorities. Some of them were decisions of the President, and some others, such as the civilian involvement in the defense policies, were granted by the lack of interest of the politicians in the subject. These issues are explained in next chapter.

PREROGATIVE	1961	1992	1999
1. Military relationship to the Head of the state.	LOW	HIGH	LOW
2. Active-duty participation on the cabinet.	MOD	MOD	HIGH
3. Role of Senior career civil servants or civilians political appointees.	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
4. Role of civilian authorities in Military Promotions	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
5. Role of the military in the State Enterprise	MOD	MOD	HIGH
6. Role of the military in Internal security issues	MOD	HIGH	HIGH
7. Control of the Intelligence Apparatus	MOD	HIGH	HIGH
8. Role of civilians and officers in formulating security strategy and defining the roles and missions of the Armed Forces.	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH

Table 1. Selected Prerogatives of the Venezuelan Military 1961-1992-1999.

Low: Low military control

Mod: Moderate control

High: High military control

Source: Stepan, Alfred, *"Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone."* Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press, 1988, 95-99.

#### D. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE PREROGATIVES OF THE MILITARY IN VENEZUELA

Table 1 shows that from 1961 until 1992, civilians had control over the military despite the fact that conditions of the military prerogatives were not the ideal Stepanian model of low military influence in a democracy. Three of the prerogatives were high, but the country enjoyed democratic stability. Those prerogatives were the role of senior career civil servants or civilian political appointees and the role of civilian authorities in military promotions.

In 1992 one prerogative moved from low to high: military relationship to the head of the state. Two of them moved from moderate to high: control of the intelligence apparatus and role of the military in internal security issues. A total of three prerogatives

moved to the high rating, thus increasing the military's influence on those fields of the political arena.

In 1999, two prerogatives moved from moderate to high: active-duty participation in the cabinet and the role of the military in the state enterprises. Meanwhile, one prerogative moved from high to low: military relationship to the head of the state.

Nevertheless for 1999, eight of the nine prerogatives studied are high in favor of the military. Consequently, the overall changes in the prerogatives from 1961 to 1999 indicate an increasing influence of the military in the political arena. According to Alfred Stepan, these changes are an indication of the weakening of the civilian control over the military.

However, the increasing influence of the Armed Forces in the political arena in Venezuela has not materialized as a source of conflict with politicians. There is no doubt that some of the appointments made by the President have caused discontent among some civilian public servants that have seen their jobs taken away and given to military officers. On the other hand, the increasing role of the Armed Forces in many the fields of the public administration has been well received by the middle and lower classes. Only the upper class sector has shown discontent with the policies of President Chávez in this respect. Perhaps it is a matter of economic interest being affected by the presence of the Armed Forces in scenarios where the upper class had the decision-making power.

#### **E. ASSESSMENTS OF THE MODEL PRESENTED BY ALFRED STEPAN**

The model presented by Alfred Stepan is useful to assess the level of the changes that occurred in the military prerogatives. However, it does not explain why. Although



the changes in the prerogatives indicate a weakening of the civilian control over the military, they do not explain the reason why. Its application leaves some questions unanswered such as the reason for the abrupt changes in the military behavior in 1992. Why did the coup attempts happen? Why did they fail? Why did the population not support the insurgents? Why, if the military control most of the key dimensions do civilian authorities have still control over the military? These questions are the subject of the next chapter.

These aspects are the main subjects of analysis of the next chapter. The thesis seeks to assess a theoretical explanation for the causes of the democratic crisis that Venezuela is living since 1989, and more specifically, for the causes of the deterioration of civil-military relations.

## **IV. ANALYTICAL MODELS AS APPLIED TO THE STATUS OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

As can be seen in Chapter III, the model developed by Alfred Stepan is very useful to illustrate that there has been a decrease in the civilian's control over the military. This is established based on the level of changes that occurred in some key dimension of civil-military relations in Venezuela. Nevertheless, it does not explain the reasons for those changes.

Several important questions need to be answered. First, why did a faction of the military in Venezuela attempt a coup against the democratic regime in 1992? Was the discontent with the government's reaction to the riots of 1989 a convincing reason? Why did the rest of the military not support the insurrection? Why did the population not support the plotters in their attempt to overthrow the regime of Carlos Andrés Pérez? Was the fear of an over-reaction of the government the excuse to stay at home? Why did the politicians leave the control over the military solely in the hand of the President since the beginning of the democratic era?

Assessing the answers to these questions will accomplish the first purpose of this thesis --to find an explanation for the deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela. The theory used to seek those answers will accomplish the second and final goal of this thesis --to find a theoretical explanation for the deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela.

In this sense, the chapter aims to find a theoretical model that best explains the causes of the deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela in one of the schools of comparative politics. First, this chapter assesses how each of the schools of comparative politics addresses the issues of civil-military relations. During this analysis, this chapter seeks to answer some of the questions raised by the framework of Alfred Stepan. In addition, the process of analysis will produce assessments for each school; it will address the strengths and weaknesses of each of them when explaining the reasons for the deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela. Finally, based on the assessments mentioned before, this chapter will establish which school best explains the causes of the crisis of civil-military relations in Venezuela.

#### **B. RATIONAL CHOICE, CULTURAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS**

Mark Lichbach states that in comparative politics there are three active ideal-type research traditions: the culturalist, rationalist, and institutionalist.<sup>104</sup> These three schools have produced most of the literature written about the interaction between civilian governments and military. In the case of Latin America, all the research done in the subfield of civil-military relations can be considered in one of these models.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Lichbach, 240.

<sup>105</sup> Hunter, 1999, 2.

Nevertheless, these schools as Karen Remmer has stated have been driven by eclecticism that has denied the opportunity for better and new theories.<sup>106</sup>

The purpose of this section is to present a framework based in the comparison of each school. Following the work of Mark Lichbach, this framework is established assessing the main assumptions that each school makes when studying civil-military relations. To this point, it is necessary to emphasize that all three schools are important because they summarize the theory needed to understand civil-military relations. Thus, one must have the appraisal that "Whereas rationalists study how actors employ reason to satisfy their interest, culturalist study norms that constitute individual and group identities, and structuralism explores relations among actors in an institutional context."<sup>107</sup>

The next three sub-sections aim to enhance the understanding of how each school of thought views the issue of civil-military relations and how well each of them explains the Venezuelan case. Finally, the last section of this chapter draws the conclusions of which one of them best explains the deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela.

### **1. Rational Choice**

Rationalists assume that: first, the individual, or what Wendy Hunter calls "some analogue of individuals" is the fundamental unit of analysis.<sup>108</sup> Second, individuals are

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<sup>106</sup> Remmer has stated that there is the need for a combined theory capable of eliminate the blindness caused by professional jealousy among the three schools of comparative politics. See Karen Remmer, "New Theoretical Perspectives on Democratization", *Comparative Politics*, 29:1, (October 1995), 104.

<sup>107</sup> Lichbach, 249.

<sup>108</sup> Lichbach, 2.

the major actors and when they have to select an alternative to achieve their goals, they will take the alternative that maximizes the chances to reach that goal. Third, the goals of the individual actors are basic, consistent, and can be easily classified by their importance. Fourth, individuals are able to face different situations, determine their adversaries and their adversaries' goals. This capability of the individual will allow him to select the most profitable alternative in searching for his goal, in other words, to select a strategy. Finally, rational choice followers assume that institutions shape the strategies that actors pursue and that an actor will always preserve the institution to which he belongs.<sup>109</sup>

In summary, rationalists assume that actors behave based on their interest. They are pragmatic and largely materialistic. This is the reason why (some) rationalists like Wendy Hunter assume that "Politicians and officers are rational actors who interact with one another in strategic ways."<sup>110</sup> Politicians and officers will not enter in a conflict unless their actions interfere with one another's interests.

For the followers of rational choice, rationality plays an important role in influencing the gradation of a military's involvement in politics. Moreover, rationalists argue that the military seeks to influence politics and the politicians, allow the Armed Forces to play the political game, as long as the military involvement does not affect their interests.

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<sup>109</sup> Geddes, Barbara, "Uses and Limitation of Rational Choice," In Peter Smith, ed. *Latin America in Comparative Politics: New Approaches to Methods and Analysis*. Boulder, CO. Westview Press, Inc., 1995, 36.

<sup>110</sup> Hunter, 1999, 1.

For Wendy Hunter the politicians can be expected to contest the military when the military's actions conflict with their opportunity to gain widespread electoral appeal. She argues that this might occur when:

First, electoral competition motivates politicians to search for economic assets to distribute as pork barrel as well as for more programmatic purposes, thereby improving their chances of election. The pursuit of public resources pits politicians directly in competition with the military for state resources. Second, politicians often try to gain standing with the mass citizenry by supporting policies that recognize popular desires for change, such as greater socio-economic participation and political rights. An expansion of popular participation, especially if accompanied by populist politics and social mobilization, might well run counter to the military's frequent goal of maintaining the status quo. Third, and more generally, given the importance of strong government performance in order to keep public support, politicians seek maximum control over events and processes that occur within their jurisdiction, territorial or functional. Large bureaucratic organizations like the military can compromise this latitude. And, unlike alliances with the established groups or institutions, close relations with the Armed Forces rarely enhance a politician's electoral chances.<sup>111</sup>

In other words, politicians are not interested in military issues because those issues do not bring votes as a benefit. They worry about the military's involvement when it can affect the politician's constituency.

However, politically inclined militaries might interfere both in policy making and patronage distributions, thereby creating costs to politicians. When politicians find themselves in deep economic and political crises, they can court the military for the survival of the system; they thereby exploit the military's most important goal, the maintenance of the status quo.

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<sup>111</sup> Hunter, 1999, 5.

The military, on the other hand, will not intervene in politics when civilian leaders have popular support. This intervention might bring damage to the reputation of the military institution. This damage might produce material losses and hardening of the civilian control over the military. Consequently, the greater the popular mandate a government enjoys, the less likely military elites will be to aggressively counteract civilians attempts to diminish their political role.<sup>112</sup> In addition, as was shown in Chapter II, in 1958 the President took the control of the Armed Forces. He applied a policy of 'divide and conquer' and 'appeasement' that seemed to work. Meanwhile, the rest of the politicians were working on strengthening the political parties and the increase of electoral support.

Wendy Hunter argues that for the rationalists, conflict between electoral politicians and the military will always be developed. However, the greater the popular support of the politicians the lesser the influence of the military. It could explain why the politicians leave the control over the military in the hands of the President. Based on this approach, for the Venezuelan politicians the only thing that matters are the votes. However, it leaves unanswered the question of why the rest of the military did not support the insurrections of February and November 1992. If the popularity of the regime was at its lowest levels in 1992 which it would have 'made' military intervention legitimate, why did the higher levels of the military institution not take advantage of the situation and overthrow the "corrupt" regime and come out as the "Saviors of *La Patria*."

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<sup>112</sup> Hunter, Wendy, *Eroding Military Influence in Brazil: Politicians Against Soldiers*. Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1997, 6.

Rationality does not have an answer for this question. Neither does it answer the question of why the population did not take advantage of the two coup attempts and support the insurgents to achieve their expectations? The threat of a governmental over-reaction was not as high as the possible maximized outcome of a popular intervention or the defeat of a 'corrupt' regime and the beginning of a new more just government. If the main cities in Venezuela were already under the control of the MBR200 and Caracas was the only target to be achieved why did the population not take to the streets and support the Golpistas? Rationality does not answer this question.

In summary, the rational choice approach is useful to answer why the politicians left the civilian control only in the hands of the President. However, rationalism is weak in explaining the lack of support to the insurgents, either from the rest of the military or from the general population.

## **2. Culturalism**

Culturalists do not examine the individual as a unit. They study groups of individuals, tribes, communities and nations. They focus on the values and beliefs that are common to all the members. For a culturalist, individuals act by rules and not by interests. The culturalist approach is subjective and interpretative. The culturalist approach is based mostly on history and its interpretation. For them, the decision of the individuals, even in objective matters, is based on their cultural orientation. Culture explains why in Latin America the military have always intervened in politics. Basically, officers are brought up with the beliefs that they have the right to take power because, historically they have been the defenders of the state and its interest. Therefore, any time



civilians fail to fulfill the nation's interest; the military feel the need to intervene. Generally, for culturalist, Latin American officers are historically "Caudillos."<sup>113</sup>

For the culturalists the military, especially in Latin America, have an orientation toward elitism, authoritarianism, corporatism, and patriotism. This orientation is highly compatible with the principles and values of the Spanish Catholicism.<sup>114</sup> As Howard Wiarda argues: "The tendency of hierarchically structured institutions like the church and the military is understood to stem from Iberian patterns."<sup>115</sup>

Some of the most significant examples of the cultural approach to the study of civil-military relations are the works of Brian Loveman. He argues that the military in Latin America, going back to their relevant role in the independence movements of the Nineteenth Century, believe that they are strongly connected to the nation-state and to the founding and development of Latin America republics. Moreover, Loveman states that the role they played in these developments led them to arrogate themselves as progenitors and permanent custodians of their countries.

In his work, Loveman explains current civil-military relations by reaching back to the past of the Armed Forces and connecting it to the present. He argues that the continuity of the military's interventionism is part of the historical heritage of the Armed Forces of Latin America. In explaining this issue he argues:

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<sup>113</sup> Wiarda, Howard, *Introduction to Comparative Politics: Concepts and Processes*, Belmont, CA., Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993, 73.

<sup>114</sup> Hunter, 1999, 9.

<sup>115</sup> Wiarda, Howard J. "Toward a Framework for the Study of Political Changes in the Iberic-American Tradition: The Corporative Model." *World Politics* 25: 2 (January 1973), 206.

As in the past, when Latin American Armed Forces participate in politics, they will do so in the name of *La Patria*. They were convinced that when the 'politicians, fail to protect their nations' sovereignty and transcendental interests, it is the duty of the Armed Forces to carry out their historic and constitutional missions. Despite the 'democratization fad,' they remain, in the doctrine, in military lore, and in the mind of many of their fellow citizens, the 'ultimate reservoir of sovereignty' who guarantee 'the historical continuity of the nation.'<sup>116</sup>

Brian Loveman also states:

Latin American civil-military relations and the role of the Armed Forces in politics, like those of all modern nation-states, are framed by constitutional and legal norms. In practice, they are also the result of expectations, attitudes, and actions evolved over centuries –integral aspects of national political culture.<sup>117</sup>

Culturalists believe that even though ideas of democracy have swept the hemisphere during the past two decades, they have not replaced earlier orientations but rather have co-existed alongside them. Thereby, culturalists question the degree to which these latter values have actually taken root in the military's minds and hearts. The important point is to study their impact across the countries in Latin America.<sup>118</sup>

In our case study, as was shown in Chapter II, the Armed Forces of Venezuela underwent a gradual cultural change toward the acceptance of democracy during the 1940s and 1950s. However, there is convincing evidence that the behavior of the Armed Forces, at least a faction of it, underwent radical changes from the democratic military of

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<sup>116</sup> Loveman, Brian, "Latin American Civil-Military Relations in the 1990s: The Armed Forces and the 'Democratization' Fad." Paper prepared for presentation for the Latin American Studies Association. Chicago, Illinois, September 24-26, 1998, 29.

<sup>117</sup> Loveman, Brian, *Por La Patria: Politics and The Armed in Latin America*, Wilmington, DE, An Scholarly Resources INC., 1999, xii.

<sup>118</sup> Wiarda, Howard and Harvey F. Kline, "The Latin American Tradition and Process of Development." In Howard Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, eds, *Latin America Politics and Development*. Boulder, CO Westview Press, Inc, 1990, 23.

1958 to the insurrections of 1992. If military interventionism is rooted in the hearts and minds of the officers cops as many culturalists argue, how can the political passivity of the Armed Forces of Venezuela from 1958 until 1992, and from 1993 to our days be explained?

On the other hand, if the Venezuelan military has a proven 'democratic culture', why did a faction of it attempt a coup against a democratically elected government? Culture fails to explain the rapid changes in behavior occurring in the Venezuelan military, mainly because as Marc Howard Ross argues:

Cultures are commonly viewed as slow-changing entities... How, then the concept of culture help comparativists deals with issues of political change, especially rapid developments... Cultural analyses are not better than the other partial theories. There are some phenomena for which each is most powerful, and some aspects of changes are not best explained in cultural terms.<sup>119</sup>

The cultural approach of Brian Loveman '*Por La Patria*' could explain the behavior of the members of the MBR200. However, it does not explain why it happened in such a short- term. Does culture not need time to change? This is the main weakness of the cultural approach when dealing with the crisis of civil-military relations in Venezuela. It does not account for rapid changes. If the attempts of coup of 1992 were the continuation of a sequence of military uprisings, it could be assumed that the Venezuelan Armed Forces were by culture '*golpistas*'. Otherwise, the cultural approach could have been very helpful.

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<sup>119</sup> Ross, Marc Howard, "Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis," in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, eds., *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*. Cambridge, NY., Cambridge University Press, 1997, 64-65.

### 3. Institutionalism

Institutionalists, or structuralists, study the interactions, links, and interdependence among different parts of a system. The structural approach is methodologically holist, emphasizing the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts.<sup>120</sup> The study of the conditions of the system, either material or institutional is the focus of the institutionalists. One of the most significant characteristics of the institutional approach is that it regards culture and rationality as a derivative of structure. In addition, institutionalists focus on the political, economic, and social connections among the members of the institutions and entities. As Mark Lichbach states, "institutionalist relate social types with causal powers, and structures with laws of dynamic."<sup>121</sup> Institutionalists hold that institutional factors can shape both the objectives of political actors and the distribution of power among them in a given polity.<sup>122</sup>

Finally, institutionalists assume that institutions have an independent and formative influence on politics<sup>123</sup>. In that sense, W. Richard Scott argues that: "Institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior."<sup>124</sup> These three types of structures

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<sup>120</sup> *American Heritage Dictionary* (1994) s. v. "Holism."

<sup>121</sup> Lichbach, 245.

<sup>122</sup> Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo, Eds. *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, Cambridge, NY. Cambridge University Press 1992, 6.

<sup>123</sup> Lichbach, 81.

<sup>124</sup> Scott, W. Richard, *Institutions and Organizations*, Thousand Oaks, CA. SAGE Publications, 1998, 33.

become what are known as the *three pillars of institutions*, a set of approaches within the institutional school of comparative politics.

The first subfield, the *normative pillar*, states that within any institution or set of institutions there are normative rules that act as prescriptions constraining the institutional behavior. Those prescriptions include values and norms. The basis of compliance within this approach is social obligation. The mechanism of implementation is based on certification and accreditation. Finally, the basis of its legitimacy is morally governed.

The second subfield is the *regulative pillar*. The regulative subfield of comparative politics is understood as the one that emphasizes the regulative aspects of institutions. Under this approach institutions constrain and regularize behavior. Thereby, the basis of their mechanism of compliance is coercion. In addition, institutions have the capacity of establishing rules and laws to manipulate actions. Consequently, a system of reward and punishment is created to regularize behavior within the institutional realm. The basis of the legitimacy of this subfield is that rules and laws are legally sanctioned.

Finally, the third subfield is known as the *cognitive pillar*. Under this approach, institutionalists stress the cognitive elements of institutions: the rules that constitute the nature of reality and the frames through which meaning is made.<sup>125</sup> In this approach, the basis of a compliance mechanism is taken for granted. The basis of the institutional legitimacy is culturally supported, conceptually correct. In other words, the cognitive approach states that institutional behavior is regulated by the continuous repetition of

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<sup>125</sup> Scott, 40.

learned abilities and tasks. These abilities and tasks prevail through a mimetic process and become the rules and norms that constrain behavior.<sup>126</sup>

In this framework, institutionalists have tried to address the issues of civil-military relations. Wendy Hunter in her work *Reason, Culture or Structure: Assessing Civil-Military Dynamics in Latin America* argues that there are various forms by which institutionalists explain the military's political involvement. For her the institutionalists approach the issues of civil-military relations based on economic and sociological variables.<sup>127</sup>

An example of an institutional approach based on economic and social variables is the work of Guillermo O'Donnell on bureaucratic-authoritarianism.<sup>128</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell introduced the concept of "bureaucratic-authoritarianism" as that regime characterized by a technocratic, bureaucratic, non-personalistic approach to policy-making. Bureaucratic-authoritarianism was also defined by the institutionalized presence of the military in the political arena.<sup>129</sup> This type of regime emerged as a reaction to three major issues. First, the economic problems originated after the first phase of industrialization and the raising expectations created deepen industrialization, second, an increase in the economic activities of popular sectors, and third the increasing relevance of technocratic roles.

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<sup>126</sup> Scott, 39.

<sup>127</sup> Hunter, 1999, 10.

<sup>128</sup> O'Donnell, Guillermo, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics*. Berkeley, CA. Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1973, 34.

<sup>129</sup> Hunter, 1999, 10.

Civilian technocrats joined with military officers with the intent to cope with popular mobilization and to promote major changes in economic policies. Consequently, they conspired in staging coups, seizing power, and co-governing.

O'Donnell's work may have had its validity from the mid 1970s until the early 1990s, especially while explaining the regimes that existed in Argentina (1966, 1973, and 1976-1983), Brazil (1964-1985), Chile (1973-1990), and Uruguay (1973-1985.) However, the wave of democratization that started in the 1980s and 1990s created new issues to be addressed. The fall of authoritarian regimes raised question about the modes of transition and the need for democratic consolidation. Structural approaches like the one presented by O'Donnell fail to explain these issues.

In that sense, the rejection of a structural approach based on economic and sociological variables made way for a more institutional approach: the study of new issues as the mode of transitions and its effects on the gradation of military power and autonomy. The works of Terry Karl (1990) and Alfred Stepan (1988) are some of the most significant examples of this trend.

Terry Karl argues that:

There is a path-dependent approach which clarifies how broad structural changes shape particular regime transitions in ways that may be especially conducive to (or especially obstructive of) democratization. This needs to be combined with an analysis of how such structural changes become embodied in political institutions and rules, which subsequently mold preferences and capacities of individuals during and after regime changes. In this way, it should be possible to demonstrate how the range of options available to decision makers at a given point in time is a function of structures put in places in an earlier period...<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Terry L. Karl, 1990, 7.

When studying the Venezuelan case, Terry Karl states that dependence on petroleum revenues produced a distinctive type of institutional settings, the Petro-state, which encourages the political distribution of rents. Such a state is characterized by fiscal reliance on Petrodollars, which expands state jurisdictions and weakens authority as other extractives capabilities within. As a result, when faced with competing pressures, state officials become habituated to relying on the progressive substitution of public spending for statecraft, thereby further weakening state capacity. This weakening of the state capacity is compensated by the centralization of power in the hands of the President. Consequently, one of the most relevant consequences of effects of the Petro-State in Venezuela is the bolstering of the strong institution of the presidency.<sup>131</sup>

In Venezuela, the existence of a strong President that controls the military based on the concentration of authority in his hands, allowed the rest of the political institutions like Congress and political parties not to have to worry about this issue. They were able to 'forget' the issue of controlling the military because the President might use his hierarchical powers over the military to control them. He, as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, had to be obeyed. Thereby, military loyalty to the President was taken for granted.

Alfred Stepan in his work *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone* argues that a negotiated transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic regime would provide the military, along with the civilian elites that supported them,

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<sup>131</sup> Stepan, 17.



with long-lasting political clout.<sup>132</sup> For Alfred Stepan under this 'negotiated' transition the Armed Forces might retain institutional privileges that would give them a strong and indefinite foundation of political leverage. "The military would be able to exercise undue influence in nonmilitary spheres as well as resist civilian directions over defense issues".<sup>133</sup>

Another example of the institutional approach is the recent book by David Pion-Berlin *Through Corridors of Power: Institutions and Civil-Military Relations in Argentina*. In this study, David Pion-Berlin argues that the power that the military lose during the transition processes does not automatically turn into civilian control over the Armed Forces. There must be a set of institutions capable of concentrating authority over the military. Moreover, David Pion-Berlin writes:

Specifically, the higher the concentration of authority and decision-making autonomy enjoyed by civilians executives, the more able they will be to reduce military influence. Conversely, the greater the dispersion of authority across different civilian actors, the more the Armed Forces can preserve their privileges by playing civilians off against one another.<sup>134</sup>

This approach assumes the concentration of authority in the figure of the President as the main tool for diminishing the military's influence in politics.

Together with Terry Karl's model, the approach of David Pion-Berlin can be very helpful in understanding the Venezuelan case. Both argue that the centralization of power in the figure of the President had two main consequences: it reduced the influence

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<sup>132</sup> Stepan, 1978, 3.

<sup>133</sup> Stepan, 1978, 13.

<sup>134</sup> Pion-Berlin, 1999, 32.

of the Armed Forces in politics; and it allowed the rest of the civilian led democratic institution not to worry about controlling the military. This explains, from an institutional approach point of view, the absence of the congress from the equation of civilian control over the military.

In addition, Harold Trinkunas argues that the model adopted by the Venezuelan Presidents to control the military was a weak institutionalized model that was based on policies of 'appeasement' and 'divide and conquer'.<sup>135</sup> This model allowed the President to control the military fairly well until 1992. The fact that the Armed Forces as a whole did not support the insurrections and were able to defeat them validates the model assumed by the Venezuelan Presidents as an effective control model. However, the policies of 'appeasement' and 'divide and conquer' were responsible for the creation of institutional crevasses that resulted in the creation of the MBR200 within the Army. This phenomena can be explain by one of the principles of the institutional approach: the structure of the institutions drive the behavior of its members.

In the Venezuelan case, the model adopted by the Presidents created a structure in the Armed Forces that as General Muller-Rojas argues "Was characterized by the rupture of the chain of communication between the higher levels and the middle ranks of the military institution."<sup>136</sup> This argument coincides with the approach of Craig Arceneaux when he states that the breakage of the communication chain within the Venezuela military allowed the misinterpretation of the constitution and the military doctrine and

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<sup>135</sup> Trinkunas, 1998, 285.

<sup>136</sup> Müller-Rojas, 83.

triggered the two coup attempts of 1992.<sup>137</sup> In summary, the structure of the institution, defined by the control model adopted by the Venezuelan Presidents, allowed the 'misconduct' of the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement 200 (MBR200).

Under this approach we can answer the two questions posed in the introduction of this chapter. First, why did a faction of the Army attempt a coup against the democratic regime? It could be said that the coup was attempted because of the misinterpretation of the Constitution and the military doctrine due to the rupture of communications between the higher levels and middle levels of the military institutions. Second, why did the rest of the Armed Forces not support the insurrections? The insurrections were not supported because the policy to 'divide and conquer' adopted by the government did not allow the ideas of the MBR200 to be disseminated throughout the military ranks. In addition, the fear of the loss of their careers and the possibility of facing jail as punishment, constrained the officer corps from supporting the insurgents once the attempts of coup began. This explanation is based on the principles of the regulative subfield of the institutional approach.

The institutional approach also presents a significant strength when explaining the reasons for the increase in the military prerogatives during the past eight years. The institutional arrangement of the Venezuelan State previous to 1998 was characterized by a bloated public sector driven by policies of patronage, partisan affiliations, and nepotism. Efficiency and efficacy to create high levels of productivity were not part of

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<sup>137</sup> Arceneaux, 70.

the institutional goals. Meanwhile, the military reached higher levels of education in many fields of the economic, technical, and political arenas.

The decrease of the economic resources of the rentier-state forced first, President Caldera and latter President Chávez to seek in the 'well educated' military the human resources needed for the rapid development of the economic and technological fields deteriorated by the previous institutional arrangements of the 'bloated Petro-State'. Consequently, many military have been appointed to key positions of the state enterprises and the cabinet of President Chávez. For President Chávez, the behavior of those officers and the fulfillment of their obligation go further than the expectations established in a set of laws and regulations. Their performance in those 'civilian functions' becomes a matter of prestige and a *social obligation*. The decision of President Caldera and President Chávez to employ military officers in civilian functions is compatible with the principles established in the *normative* subfield of the institutional approach. The performance of those officers is expected to be driven not only by rules and the laws but also by norms of social and moral obligation.

Finally, let us address the question of why the population did not support the insurrections of 1992. First of all, in 1992 Venezuelans had lived under a democratic regime for almost forty years. Those citizens old enough to vote were either too young to remember the years of the dictatorship or old enough to recall the atrocities of the dictatorial regime of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez. The old citizens did not want to return to the years of the political repression and the uncertainties of the authoritarian regime.

Meanwhile, the young citizens had learned about the elections as the democratic procedure to replace the political leadership once the constitutional period had been completed. That is why under the knowledge of the closed electoral campaign of 1993 and the learned behavior of the electoral process, many Venezuelans decided not to support the insurgents and let the democratic process continue. Time gave reason to those that did not support the coup attempts. In 1994, Carlos Andrés Pérez the main target of the insurrections, was impeached and removed from office through constitutional means. Meanwhile, after the economic failures of the government of Rafael Caldera, the Venezuelan voters implemented their hopes in the elections of 1998. Thereby, Hugo Chávez Frias, leader of the MBR200, was democratically elected President of Venezuela.

The behavior of the Venezuelan electorate and their rejection of unconstitutional procedures to change political leaders are the result of forty years of democratic learning. The repetitive elections and the changeovers among the eight democratic governments since 1958 induced the Venezuelans to behave within the democratic expectations. This is a clear example of behavior driven by mimetic knowledge, which constitutes the basis of the cognitive subfield of the institutional approach.

The institutional approach has shown to have significant strength in explaining the crisis in civil-military relations in Venezuela, and moreover, the Venezuelan democratic crisis in general. However, it also has certain weaknesses. For example, the unwillingness of politicians to use congress as a mean to control civil-military relations cannot be explained by the principles of the institutional approach. In this sense, the

rational choice approach explains this phenomena better when it states that politicians' only concern about military contestation is risen when the influence of the Armed Forces can affect electoral results. This assumption comes closer that any to explain the absence of another civilian led institution in the control over the military. In addition, the institutional approach comes up short of a convincing answer to the question of the misinterpretation of the constitution and military doctrine made by the member of the MBR200. If any rupture between the superior levels and the middle levels of the institution occurred the answer must be sought not only in structural restraint but also in moral values and belief. In other words, the birth of Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 (MBR200) may mark the beginning of a new culture within the Armed Forces of Venezuela.

Despite these two facts, the institutional approach has proven to be more useful in the understanding of civil-military relations in Venezuela than the rational choice of culture. Moreover, it has presented a scenario where the increased military prerogatives do not mean an increased military political influence. The institutional approach with its three sub-fields has allowed us to review in depth the democratic spirit of the Armed Forces of Venezuela. The Venezuelan Armed Forces is an institution that has demonstrated its complete submission to the democratic principles of the republic.

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## V. CONCLUSIONS

The main argument of this thesis is that since 1989 the civil-military relations in Venezuela have undergone a process of deterioration that endangered the prospects for the survival of the democratic regime. In addition, it also argues that in the field of comparative politics there is a lack of theoretical explanations for many important aspects of civil-military relations. Based on those two arguments, the next section presents a set of conclusions for the thesis that: first, confirm the deterioration of the civil-military relations in Venezuela, and second draws the theoretical approach that best explain why that happened.

### A. SUMMARY

Beginning in the early 1900s, the transformation of Venezuela from an agrarian state to a petro-state defined the institutional structures of the newly centralized nation-state. The concentration of power and authority in the hands of the chief executive was the main feature not only of the authoritarian regimes of the first four decades, but also of the democratic regime of the last half of this century. The state institutions were structured based on policies of clientelism and nepotism. First, the dictators and then the Presidents used the welfare produced by the oil income as the source of their political power.

The democratic experiment was initiated in Venezuela in 1958 with the establishment of a pact among the three main parties: AD, COPEI, and URD. This new democratic regime had three distinctive features. First, the establishment of a rentier-



state model based on the oil revenues. Second, the political leaders adopted policies of populism, clientelism, and nepotism that allowed them to penetrate all the social strata and create a bloated public sector. Third, the President became the only source of civilian control over the military adopting a subjective control model based on the politicization of the Armed Forces through policies of 'divide and conquer' and 'appeasement'.

However, in 1983, in the face of low oil prices all the structural frames failed to function and the government was confronted with a legitimacy crisis. The lack of performance of the government resulted in massive riots and looting as expressions of the popular discontent with the regime. The over reaction of the government to the popular disobedience of 1989 triggered the two coup attempts of 1992. These two military uprisings denoted the deterioration of civil-military relations. In addition, the failure of economic and political decision making policies during the 1980s and first half of the 1990s caused the voters to reject the traditional political parties in the Presidential elections of 1993 and 1998.

#### **B. DETERIORATION OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA**

Despite the fact that the model adopted by the civilian leadership to control the military was able to prevent the breakdown of the democratic regime in 1992, it showed evidence of significant failures. First, the creation of factions within the armed forces during the early 1980s and their coup attempts in 1992. Under the subjective control model, the political leadership of the country erroneously viewed the lack of military interventionism as evidence of unconditional submission of the Armed Forces to civilian

authority. However, the model of 'divide and conquer' and 'appeasement' fragmented the command structure and unity of the military.

This fragmentation of the military institution restrained the coherent dissemination of the democratic doctrine throughout all the ranks of the institution. The failures of the chain of communication and the increasing cases of military corruption nurtured the discontent of the middle levels of the institution that had the opportunity to receive a more politically oriented education.

Second, the model adopted is based on the concentration of power and authority in the hands of the President to control the military. This deficiency is increased by the absence of other civilian led institutions interested in issues of military control and national security and defense. At the same time, the absence of a third actor produces the lack of a mechanism of accountability for the interactions between the President and the Armed Forces. Consequently, the relationship between the military and the Head of State based only on a subjective control model produces undesired politicization of the ranks and is a source of corruptive policies.

Third, the absence of civilian participation in the formulation of national security strategies, definition of the military missions, and the process of military promotion increases the influence of the military in the political arena allowing them to enjoy privileges that give them advantages over their civilians counterparts.

Finally, the increasing presence of active duty officers in all fields of the political and economic arena is evidence of the deterioration of the civil-military relations. The actual perception is that the military's technical knowledge, efficacy, efficiency, and

discipline can bring the country out of the economic and political crisis where it is submerged.

Despite all this evidence, the Venezuelan Armed Forces as a whole have shown a high democratic spirit and have proven to be loyal to the regime. However, as Felipe Agüero argues:

The military faces decisions regarding new missions in the light of changes in global and regional scenarios and regarding its institutional insertion in the state in the light of state reform and the continued changes which economic structural adjustment will demand.<sup>138</sup>

On the other hand, the military's growing concern with domestic issues has intensified. A continuation of this trend could further damage civil-military relations.

### **C. THE THEORETICAL EXPLANATION OF THE DETERIORATION OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA**

In the completion of its second purpose, this thesis draws the conclusion that the institutional approach is the most useful theoretical model for explaining the deterioration of civil-military relations in Venezuela. The application of the different analytical models to the study of the crisis of civil-military relations in Venezuela indicated that the manner in which state institutions are structured is what largely drives the behavior of their members. There is a lot of evidence that the causes of the Venezuelan crisis can be best explained through the full appraisal of how the democratic institutions are structured. First, the presence of a strong President as the head of a rentier-state proved the existence of an institutionalized Presidentialism. Second, the absence of civilian led institutions like a Congress for the accountability of civil-military relations proved to be an

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<sup>138</sup> Agüero, 1992, 227.

institutional deficiency. Finally, current changes in the professionalism of the Armed Forces and the need for new structures and missions within the military require the institutional re-engineering of the Armed Forces.

All these facts can only be fully understood with an approach stressing the study of the structures of those institutions.

However, this thesis recognizes the specificity of the application of the institutional approach to the Venezuelan case and the need for a more comprehensive approach able to explain other cases. It also recognizes the influence of culture and rationality on the behavior of the institutions. Hopefully, searching for a more complete theoretical explanation is a fascinating subject for further studies.

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